



Turn back } Sher. Knawles
Woman's Wt }

Don't forget }
The Athenian Capture } Dufford

THE HUNCHBACK.

A PLAY, IN FIVE ACTS.



BY

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES,

AUTHOR OF "VIRGINIUS," "THE WIFE," &c.

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TO
MAJOR FRANCIS CAMPBELL.

(LATE OF THE 8th, OR KING'S OWN.)

MY DEAR SIR,

As an enthusiastic admirer of the Drama, and as a gentleman, from whom, solely on account of my connexion with it, I have received the most flattering attention, you are entitled to the Dedication of this Play, and it is accordingly inscribed to you,

By your grateful servant,

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

(AS ORIGINALLY PERFORMED.)

JULIA	<i>Miss F. Kemble.</i>
HELEN	<i>Miss Taylor.</i>
MASTER WALTER	<i>Mr. J. S. Knowles.</i>
SIR THOMAS CLIFFORD	<i>Mr. C. Kemble.</i>
LORD TINSEL	<i>Mr. Wrench.</i>
MASTER WILFORD	<i>Mr. J. Mason.</i>
MODUS	<i>Mr. Abbott.</i>
MASTER HEARTWELL	<i>Mr. Evans.</i>
GAYLOVE	<i>Mr. Henry.</i>
FATHOM	<i>Mr. Meadows.</i>
THOMAS	<i>Mr. Barnes.</i>
STEPHEN	<i>Mr. Payne.</i>
WILLIAMS	<i>Mr. Irwin.</i>
SIMPSON	<i>Mr. Brady.</i>
WAITER	<i>Mr. Heath.</i>
HOLDWELL	<i>Mr. Bender.</i>

SERVANTS, *Messrs. J. Cooper and Lollett.*

P R E F A C E.

THIS Comedy owes its existence to the failure of "The Beggar's Daughter of Bethnal Green," which was produced under the most unfavourable circumstances, and in the unavoidable absence of the author. I did not like to be baffled, especially, as I thought, without good reason; and cheered by the generous, enthusiastic advocacy of the editor of the Atlas, (a perfect stranger to me,) I set to work upon The Hunchback.

My friend, Mr. Macready, who was very angry with me for again attempting a walk in which I had failed,—and who came to Glasgow, solely as I believe for the object of expostulating with me,—was the first to encourage me to proceed. I had completed my first act. I read it to him, and he told me to go on. This I thought the happiest of omens, for many a proof had he given me of his admirable judgment in such things. This happened about two years ago.

It was not, however, until the latter end of the summer of 1831, that I had leisure to proceed with my work. I recommenced it on the pleasant walks about Birmingham, and completed it on the sands of Newhaven—my roomy study, where, at the same time, I remodelled "Alfred." I brought both plays up to town with me in April last.

“The Hunchback” was read to Mr. Lee, and instantly accepted by that gentleman, who, without hesitation, granted me terms even more advantageous than those which I required for it from Covent Garden; and to whose polite and liberal deportment towards me, during his brief, divided reign of management, I joyfully take this opportunity of bearing testimony. The play, however, was defective in the under-plot, which was perfectly distinct from the main one. This error Mr. Macready pointed out to me,—as did subsequently Mr. Morton, in an elaborate critique, as full of kindness as of discrimination. My avocations, however, did not leave me at liberty to revise my work, till about two months ago, when I constructed my under-plot anew; and, having done my best to obviate objections, presented “The Hunchback” to Drury Lane, from which establishment I subsequently withdrew it, because it was not treated with the attention which I thought it merited.

Let me take this opportunity of thanking Mr. Farren for the extremely handsome terms in which he spoke of this Comedy previously to its representation, and to express my sincere regret, that the character of The Hunchback should have suffered from the loss of his masterly personation of the part,—for masterly it assuredly would have been.

I took my play to Covent Garden, and in little more than a fortnight “The Hunchback” was ready,—every way improved by the superintending care of Mr. Bartley; strengthened in effect by curtailment and condensation,—deliberately, and modestly, recommended by him, and thankfully adopted by me. It was produced on Thursday, the 5th of April. It succeeded,—thanks to the actors who so warmly interested themselves in its success,—and to the kind audience who rejoiced with them and me.

And now for brief, but heart-warm acknowledgments, And first to Miss Fanny Kemble ; I owe her such a personation of my heroine, as—proud though I was of my offspring—I did not think that heroine afforded scope for. Her Julia has outstripped my most sanguine hopes ! Can I say more ? Yes,—the soul of Siddons breathes its inspiration upon us again. The “ Do it ! ” of Julia, in the elocution of the actress, stands beside the “ Hereafter ! ” of Lady Macbeth—that instance of transcending histrionic display which I never hoped to hear equalled. I could say a great deal more, but I leave it to those who can say it a great deal better, and who are worthier witnesses, because less interested ones.

Miss Taylor has laid me under deep obligations. With all her heart, and soul, and talent, she advocated my disputed pretensions to the favour of Thalia, and—may I be permitted to say?—established them.

To Mr. Kemble I am deeply indebted for accepting a part, which, I have reason to believe, no other performer of his rank would have accepted as he did, and yet which none could have performed so well. Will the rest of my brother performers be content with my general but cordial acknowledgments ?

In presenting the eighth edition of this play, I conceive it to be nothing more than a simple act of justice, to thank Miss Tree for the continued attraction of “ The Hunchback.”

London, March, 1834.

THE HUNCHBACK.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—A TAVERN.

On one side SIR THOMAS CLIFFORD, *at a table with wine before him*; *on the other* MASTER WILFORD, GAYLOVE, HOLDWELL, *and* SIMPSON, *likewise taking wine.*

WILFORD.

YOUR wine, Sir; your wine! you do not justice to mine host of the Three Tuns, nor credit to yourselves; I swear the beverage is good! It is as palatable poison as you will purchase within a mile round Ludgate! Drink, gentlemen; make free. You know I am a man of expectations; and hold my money as light as the purse in which I carry it.

GAYLOVE.

We drink, Master Wilford; not a man of us has been chased as yet.

WILFORD.

But you fill not fairly, Sirs! Look at my measure! Wherefore a large glass, if not for a large draught? Fill, I pray you, else let us drink out of thimbles. This will never do for the friends of the nearest of kin to the wealthiest peer in Britain.

GAYLOVE.

We give you joy, Master Wilford, of the prospect of advancement which has so unexpectedly opened to you.

WILFORD.

Unexpectedly indeed! But yesterday arrived the news that the Earl's only son and heir had died! and to-day has the Earl himself been seized with a mortal illness. His dissolution is looked for hourly: and I, his cousin in only the third degree, known to him but to be unnoticed by him—a decayed gentleman's son—glad of the title and revenues of a scrivener's clerk,—am the undoubted successor to his estates and coronet.

GAYLOVE.

Have you been sent for?

WILFORD.

No; but I have certified to his agent, Master Walter, the Hunch-

back, my existence, and peculiar propinquity ; and momentarily expect him here.

GAYLOVE.

Lives there any one that may dispute your claim,—I mean vexatiously ?

WILFORD.

Not a man, Master Gaylove. I am the sole remaining branch of the family tree.

GAYLOVE.

Doubtless you look for much happiness from this change of fortune ?

WILFORD.

A world ! Three things have I an especial passion for. The finest hound, the finest horse, and the finest wife in the kingdom, Master Gaylove.

GAYLOVE.

The finest wife !

WILFORD.

Yes, Sir : I marry. Once the Earldom comes into my line, I shall take measures to perpetuate its remaining there. I marry, Sir ! I do not say that I shall love. My heart has changed mistresses too often to settle down in one servitude now, Sir. But fill, I pray you, friends. This, if I mistake not, is the day whence I shall date my new fortunes ; and, for that reason, hither have I invited you, that having been so long my boon companions, you should be the first to congratulate me.

Enter WAITER.

WAITER.

You are wanted, Master Wilford.

WILFORD.

By whom ?

WAITER.

One Master Walter.

WILFORD.

His Lordship's agent ! News, Sirs ! Show him in !

[*Exit* WAITER.]

My heart's a prophet, Sirs.—The Earl is dead.

Enter MASTER WALTER.

Well, Master Walter. How accost you me ?

WALTER.

As your impatience shows me you would have me.—
My lord, the Earl of Rochdale !

GAYLOVE.

Give you joy !

HOLDWELL.

All happiness, my Lord !

SIMPSON.

Long life and health unto your lordship !

GAYLOVE.

Come!

We'll drink to his lordship's health! 'Tis two o'clock,
We'll e'en carouse till midnight! Health, my lord!

HOLDWELL.

My lord, much joy to you!

SIMPSON.

All good to your Lordship!

WALTER.

Give something to the dead!

GAYLOVE.

Give what?

WALTER.

Respect!

He has made the living! First to him that's gone,
Say "Peace,"—and then with decency to revels.

GAYLOVE.

What means the knave by revels?

WALTER.

Knave?

GAYLOVE.

Ay, knave!

WALTER.

Go to! Thou'rt flushed with wine!

GAYLOVE.

Thou sayest false!

Though didst thou need a proof thou speakest true,
I'd give thee one. Thou seest but one lord here,
And I see two!

WALTER.

Reflect'st thou on my shape?

Thou art a villain!

GAYLOVE (*starting up.*)

Ha!

WALTER.

A coward, too!

Draw! (*Drawing his sword.*)

GAYLOVE.

Only mark him! how he struts about!
How laughs his straight sword at his noble back.

WALTER.

Does it? It cuffs thee for a liar then! [*Strikes GAYLOVE with his sword.*]

GAYLOVE.

A blow!

WALTER.

Another, lest you doubt the first!

GAYLOVE.

His blood on his own head! I'm for you, Sir! (*Draws.*)

CLIFFORD.

Hold, Sir! This quarrel's mine! (*Coming forward and drawing.*)

WALTER.

No man shall fight for me, Sir!

CLIFFORD.

By your leave.

Your patience, pray! My lord, for so I learn
Behoves me to accost you—for your own sake
Draw off your friend!

WALTER.

Not till we have a bout, Sir!

CLIFFORD.

My lord, your happy fortune ill you greet!
Ill greet it those who love you—greeting thus
The herald of it!

WALTER.

Sir, what's that to you?
Let go my sleeve!

CLIFFORD.

My lord, if blood be shed
On the fair dawn of your prosperity,
Look not to see the brightness of its day.
'Twill be o'ercast throughout!

GAYLOVE.

My lord, I'm struck!

CLIFFORD.

You gave the first blow, and the hardest one!
Look, Sir; if swords you needs must measure, I'm
Your mate, not he.

WALTER.

I'm mate for any man.

CLIFFORD.

Draw off your friend, my lord, for your own sake!

WILFORD.

Come, Gaylove! let's have another room.

GAYLOVE.

With all my heart, since 'tis your lordship's will.

WILFORD.

That's right! Put up! Come, friends!

[*Exeunt WILFORD and FRIENDS.*]

WALTER.

I'll follow him!

Why do you hold me? 'Tis not courteous of you!
Think'st thou I fear them? Fear! I rate them but
As dust! dross! offals! Let me at them!—Nay,
Call you this kind? then kindness know I not;
Nor do I thank you for 't! Let go, I say!

CLIFFORD.

Nay, Master Walter, they're not worth your wrath.

WALTER.

How know you me for Master Walter? By
My hunchback, Eh!—my stilts of legs and arms,

The fashion more of ape's, than man's? Aha!
 So you have heard them too—their savage gibes
 As I pass on,—“There goes my lord!” aha!
 God made me, Sir, as well as them and you.
 'Sdeath! I demand of you, unhand me, Sir!

CLIFFORD.

There, Sir, you're free to follow them! Go forth,
 And I'll go too: so on your wilfulness
 Shall fall whate'er of evil may ensue.
 Is't fit you waste your choler on a burr?
 The nothings of the town; whose sport it is
 To break their villain jests on worthy men,
 The graver still the fitter! Fie for shame!
 Regard what such would say? So would not I,
 No more than heed a cur.

WALTER.

You're right, Sir; right.
 For twenty crowns! So there's my rapier up!
 You've done me a good turn against my will;
 Which, like a wayward child, whose pet is off,
 That made him restive under wholesome check,
 I now right humbly own, and thank you for.

CLIFFORD.

No thanks, good Master Walter, owe you me!
 I'm glad to know you, Sir.

WALTER.

I pray you, now,
 How did you learn my name? Guess'd I not right?
 Was't not my comely hunch that taught it you?

CLIFFORD.

I own it.

WALTER.

Right, I know it; you tell truth.
 I like you for 't.

CLIFFORD.

But when I heard it said
 That Master Walter was a worthy man,
 Whose word would pass on 'change soon as his bond;
 A liberal man—for schemes of public good
 That sets down tens, where others units write;
 A charitable man—the good he does,
 That's told of, not the half: I never more
 Could see the hunch on Master Walter's back.

WALTER.

You would not flatter a poor citizen?

CLIFFORD.

Indeed, I flatter not!

WALTER.

I like your face:
 A frank and honest one! Your frame's well knit,
 Proportioned, shaped!

CLIFFORD.

Good Sir !

WALTER.

Your name is Clifford—

Sir Thomas Clifford. Humph ! You 're not the heir

Direct to the fair baronetcy ? He

That was, was drown'd abroad. Am I not right ?

Your cousin was 't not ? So, succeeded you

To rank and wealth, your birth ne'er promised you.

CLIFFORD.

I see you know my history.

WALTER.

I do.

You 're lucky who conjoin the benefits

Of penury and abundance ; for I know

Your father was a man of slender means.

You do not blush, I see. That's right ! Why should you ?

What merit to be dropp'd on fortune's hill ?

The honour is to mount it. You'd have done it ;

For you were train'd to knowledge, industry,

Frugality, and honesty,—the sinews

That surest help the climber to the top,

And keep him there. I have a clerk, Sir Thomas,

Once serv'd your father ; there's the riddle for you.

Humph ! I may thank you for my life to-day.

CLIFFORD.

I pray you say not so.

WALTER.

But I will say so !

Because I think so, know so, feel so, Sir !

Your fortune, I have heard, I think, is ample ;

And doubtless you live up to't ?

CLIFFORD.

'Twas my rule,

And is so still, to keep my outlay, Sir,

A span within my means.

WALTER.

A prudent rule.

The turf is a seductive pastime !

CLIFFORD.

Yes.

WALTER.

You keep a racing stud ? You bet ?

CLIFFORD.

No, neither.

'Twas still my father's precept—" Better owe

A yard of land to labour, than to chance

Be debtor for a rood ! "

WALTER.

'Twas a wise precept.

You've a fair house—you'll get a mistress for it ?

CLIFFORD.

In time.

WALTER.

In time! 'Tis time thy choice were made.
Is't not so yet? Or is thy lady love
The newest still thou see'st?

CLIFFORD.

Nay, not so.

I'd marry, Master Walter, but old use—
For, since the age of thirteen, I have lived
In the world—has made me jealous of the thing
That flatter'd me with hope of profit. Bargains
Another would snap up, might be for me
Till I had turn'd and turn'd them! Speculations,
That promised twenty, thirty, forty, fifty,
Ay cent. per cent. returns, I would not launch in,
When others were afloat, and out at sea!
Whereby I made small gains, but miss'd great losses;
As ever then I look'd before I leap'd,
So do I now.

WALTER.

Thou'rt all the better for it!
Let's see! Hand free—heart whole—well favour'd—so!
Rich, titled! Let that pass!—kind, valiant, prudent—
Sir Thomas, I can help thee to a wife,
Hast thou the luck to win her?

CLIFFORD.

Master Walter!
You jest!

WALTER.

I do not jest.—I like you! mark—
I like you, and I like not every one!
I say a wife, Sir, can I help you to,
The pearly texture of whose dainty skin
Alone were worth thy baronetcy! Form
And feature has she, wherein move and glow
The charms, that in the marble cold and still
Cull'd by the sculptor's jealous skill, and join'd there,
Inspire us! Sir, a maid, before whose feet
A duke—a duke might lay his coronet,
To lift her to his state, and partner her!
A fresh heart too! A young fresh heart, Sir, one
That Cupid has not toy'd with, and a warm one.
Fresh, young, and warm! mark that! a mind to boot.
Wit, Sir; sense, taste;—a garden strictly tended—
Where nought but what is costly flourishes.
A consort for a king, Sir! Thou shalt see her.

CLIFFORD.

I thank you, Master Walter! As you speak,
Methinks I see me at the altar foot,

Her hand fast lock'd in mine—the ring put on.
 My wedding bell rings merry in my ear;
 And round me throng glad tongues that give me joy
 To be the bridegroom of so fair a bride!

WALTER.

What! sparks so thick? We'll have a blaze anon!

SERVANT (*entering*).

The chariot's at the door.

WALTER.

It waits in time!
 Sir Thomas, it shall bear thee to the bower
 Where dwells this fair, for she's no city belle,
 But e'en a Sylvan Goddess.

CLIFFORD.

Have with you.

WALTER.

You'll bless the day you serv'd the Hunchback, Sir!

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—A GARDEN BEFORE A COUNTRY HOUSE.

Enter JULIA and HELEN.

HELEN.

I LIKE not, Julia, this your country life.
 I'm weary on't!

JULIA.

Indeed? So am not I!
 I know no other; would no other know.

HELEN.

You would no other know! Would you not know
 Another relative?—another friend—
 Another house—another any thing,
 Because the ones you have already please you?
 That's poor content! Would you not be more rich,
 More wise, more fair? The song that last you learn'd
 You fancy well; and therefore shall you learn
 No other song? Your virginal, 'tis true,
 Hath a sweet tone; but does it follow thence,
 You shall not have another virginal?
 You may, love, and a sweeter one; and so
 A sweeter life may find, than this you lead!

JULIA.

I seek it not. Helen, I'm constancy!

HELEN.

So is a cat, a dog, a silly hen,
 An owl, a bat,—where they are wont to lodge
 That still sojourn, nor care to shift their quarters.

Thou 'rt constancy? I'm glad I know thy name!
 The spider comes of the same family,
 That in his meshy fortress spends his life,
 Unless you pull it down and scare him from it.
 And so thou 'rt constancy? Art proud of that?
 I'll warrant thee I'll match thee with a snail
 From year to year that never leaves his house!
 Such constancy forsooth!—A constant grub
 That houses ever in the self-same nut
 Where he was born, till hunger drives him out,
 Or plunder breaketh through his castle wall!
 And so, in very deed, thou 'rt constancy!

JULIA.

Helen, you know the adage of the tree;—
 I've ta'en the bend. This rural life of mine,
 Enjoin'd me by an unknown father's will,
 I've led from infancy. Debarr'd from hope
 Of change, I ne'er have sigh'd for change. The town
 To me was like the moon, for any thought
 I e'er should visit it—nor was I school'd
 To think it half so fair!

HELEN.

Not half so fair!
 The town's the sun, and thou hast dwelt in night
 E'er since thy birth, not to have seen the town!
 Their women there are queens, and kings their men;
 Their houses palaces!

JULIA.

And what of that?
 Have your town palaces a hall like this?
 Couches so fragrant? walls so high adorn'd?
 Casements with such festoons, such prospects, Helen,
 As these fair vistas have? Your kings and queens!
 See me a May-day queen, and talk of them!

HELEN.

Extremes are ever neighbours. 'Tis a step
 From one to the other! Were thy constancy
 A reasonable thing—a little less
 Of constancy—a woman's constancy—
 I should not wonder wert thou ten years hence
 The maid I know thee now; but, as it is,
 The odds are ten to one, that this day year
 Will see our May-day queen a city one.

JULIA.

Never! I'm wedded to a country life:
 O, did you hear what Master Walter says!
 Nine times in ten, the town's a hollow thing,
 Where what things are is nought to what they show;
 Where merit's name laughs merit's self to scorn!
 Where friendship and esteem, that ought to be

The tenants of men's hearts, lodge in their looks
 And tongues alone. Where little virtue, with
 A costly keeper, passes for a heap;
 A heap for none that has a homely one!
 Where fashion makes the law—your umpire which
 You bow to, whether it has brains or not.
 Where Folly taketh off his cap and bells,
 To clap on Wisdom, which must bear the jest!
 Where to pass current you must seem the thing,
 The passive thing, that others think; and not
 Your simple, honest, independent self!

HELEN.

Ay: so says Master Walter. See I not
 What can you find in Master Walter, Julia,
 To be so fond of him!

JULIA.

He's fond of me.
 I've known him since I was a child. E'en then
 The week I thought a weary, heavy one,
 That brought not Master Walter. I had those
 About me then that made a fool of me,
 As children oft are fool'd; but more I lov'd
 Good Master Walter's lesson than the play
 With which they'd surfeit me. As I grew up,
 More frequent Master Walter came, and more
 I lov'd to see him. I had tutors then,
 Men of great skill and learning—but not one
 That taught like Master Walter. What they'd show me,
 And I, dull as I was, but doubtful saw,—
 A word from Master Walter made as clear
 As day-light! When my schooling days were o'er—
 That's now good three years past—three years—I vow
 I'm twenty, Helen!—well, as I was saying,
 When I had done with school, and all were gone,
 Still Master Walter came! and still he comes,
 Summer or winter—frost or rain. I've seen
 The snow upon a level with the hedge,
 Yet there was Master Walter!

HELEN.

Who comes here?
 A carriage, and a gay one,—who alights?
 Pshaw! Only Master Walter! What see you,
 Which thus repairs the arch of the fair brow,
 A frown was like to spoil?—A gentleman!
 One of our town kings. Mark—how say you now?
 Wouldst be a town queen, Julia? Which of us,
 I wonder, comes he for?

JULIA.

For neither of us;
 He's Master Walter's clerk, most like.

HELEN.

Most like !
 Mark him as he comes up the avenue ;
 So looks a clerk ! A clerk has such a gait !
 So does a clerk dress, Julia,—mind his hose—
 They 're very like a clerk's ! a diamond loop
 And button, note you, for his clerkship's hat,—
 O, certainly a clerk ! A velvet cloak,
 Jerkin of silk, and doublet of the same,—
 For all the world a clerk ! See, Julia, see,
 How Master Walter bows, and yields him place,
 That he may first go in,—a very clerk !
 I 'll learn of thee, love, when I 'd know a clerk.

JULIA.

I wonder who he is.

HELEN.

Wouldst like to know ?
 Wouldst, for a fancy, ride to town with him ?
 I prophecy he comes to take thee thither.

JULIA.

He ne'er takes me to town. No, Helen, no,
 To town who will—a country life for me !

HELEN.

We 'll see.

Enter FATHOM.

FATHOM.

You 're wanted, Madam.

JULIA (*embarrassed*).

Which of us ?

FATHOM.

You, Madam.

HELEN.

Julia ! what's the matter ? Nay,
 Mount not the rose so soon. He must not see it
 A month hence. 'Tis love's flower, which once she wears,
 The maid is all his own.

JULIA.

Go to !

HELEN.

Be sure
 He comes to woo thee ! He will bear thee hence ;
 He'll make thee change the country for the town.

JULIA.

I'm constancy. Name he the town to me,
 I'll tell him what I think on't !

HELEN.

Then you guess
 He comes a wooing ?

JULIA.
I guess nought.

HELEN.
You do !
At your grave words, your lips, more honest, smile,
And show them to be traitors. Hie to him.

JULIA.
Hie thee to soberness.

HELEN.
Ay, will I, when,
Thy bridemaids, I shall hie to church with thee.
Well, Fathom, who is come ?

FATHOM.
I know not.

HELEN.
What !
Didst thou not hear his name ?

FATHOM.
I did.

HELEN.
What is't ?

FATHOM.
I noted not.

HELEN.
What hast thou ears for then ?

FATHOM.
What good were it for me to mind his name ?
I do but what I must do. To do that
Is labour quite enough !

WALTER (*without*).
What, Fathom !

FATHOM.
Here.

WALTER (*entering*).
Here, sirrah ! Wherefore didst not come to me ?

FATHOM.
You did not bid me come.

WALTER.
I call'd thee.

FATHOM.
Yes,
And I said, " Here ; " and waited then to know
Your worship's will with me.

WALTER.
We go to town.
Thy mistress, thou, and all the house.

FATHOM.
Well, Sir ?

WALTER.
Mak'st thou not ready then to go to town ?
Hence, knave, despatch !

[*Exit.*][*Exit* FATHOM.]

HELEN.

Go we to town?

WALTER.

We do;

'Tis now her father's will she sees the town.

HELEN.

I'm glad on't. Goes she to her father?

WALTER.

No:

At the desire of thine, she for a term
Shares roof with thee.

HELEN.

I'm very glad on't.

WALTER.

What!

You like her then? I thought you would. 'Tis time
She sees the town.

HELEN.

It has been time for that
These six years.

WALTER.

By thy wisdom's count. No doubt
You've told her what a precious place it is.

HELEN.

I have.

WALTER.

I even guess'd as much. For that
I told thee of her; brought thee here to see her;
And pray'd thee to sojourn a space with her;
That its fair space, from thy too fair report,
Might strike a novice less,—so less deceive her.
I did not put thee under check.

HELEN.

'Twas right,—

Else had I broken loose, and run the wilder!
So knows she not her father yet: that's strange.
I prithee how does mine?

WALTER.

Well—very well.
News for thee.

HELEN.

What?

WALTER.

Thy cousin is in town.

HELEN.

My cousin Modus?

WALTER.

Much do I suspect
That cousin's nearer to thy heart than blood.

HELEN.

Pshaw! Wed me to a musty library!

Love him who nothing loves but Greek and Latin !
But, Master Walter, you forget the main
Surpassing point of all ! Who's come with you ?

WALTER.

Ay, that's the question !

HELEN.

Is he soldier or
Civilian ? lord or gentleman ? He's rich,
If that's his chariot ! Where is his estate ?
What brings it in ? Six thousand pounds a year ?
Twelve thousand, may be ! Is he bachelor,
Or husband ? Bachelor I'm sure he is !
Comes he not hither wooing, Master Walter ?
Nay, prithee, answer me !

WALTER.

Who says thy sex
Are curious ? That they're patient, I'll be sworn ;
And reasonable—very reasonable—
To look for twenty answers in a breath !
Come, thou shalt be enlightened—but propound
Thy questions one by one ! Thou'rt far too apt
A scholar ! My ability to teach
Will ne'er keep pace, I fear, with thine to learn.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—AN APARTMENT IN THE HOUSE.

Enter JULIA, followed by CLIFFORD.

JULIA.

No more ! I pray you, Sir, no more !

CLIFFORD.

I love you.

JULIA.

You mock me, Sir !

CLIFFORD.

Then is there no such thing
On earth as reverence. Honour filial, the fear
Of kings, the awe of supreme heaven itself,
Are only shows and sounds—that stand for nothing.
I love you !

JULIA.

You have known me scarce a minute.

CLIFFORD.

Say but a moment, still I say I love you.
Love's not a flower that grows on the dull earth ;
Springs by the calendar ; must wait for sun —
For rain ;—matures by parts,—must take its time
To stem, to leaf, to bud, to blow. It owns

A richer soil, and boasts a quicker seed !
 You look for it, and see it not ; and lo !
 E'en while you look, the peerless flower is up,
 Consummate in the birth !

JULIA.

Is't fear I feel ?
 Why else should beat my heart ? It can't be fear !
 Something I needs must say. You're from the town ;
 How comes it, Sir, you seek a country wife ?
 Methinks 'twill tax his wit to answer that.

CLIFFORD.

In joining contrasts lieth love's delight.
 Complexion, stature, nature, mateth it,
 Not with their kinds, but with their opposites.
 Hence hands of snow in palms of russet lie ;
 The form of Hercules affects the sylph's ;
 And breasts that case the lion's fear-proof heart
 Find their lov'd lodge in arms where tremors dwell !
 Haply for this, on Afric's swarthy neck,
 Hath Europe's priceless pearl been seen to hang,
 That makes the orient poor ! So with degrees.
 Rank passes by the circlet-graced brow,
 Upon the forehead bare of notelessness
 To print the nuptial kiss. As with degrees
 So is't with habits ; therefore I, indeed
 A gallant of the town, the town forsake,
 To win a country wife.

JULIA.

His prompt reply
 My backward challenge shames ! Must I give o'er ?
 I'll try his wit again. Who marries me
 Must lead a country life.

CLIFFORD.

The life I'd lead !
 But fools would fly from it ; for O ! 'tis sweet !
 It finds the heart out, be there one to find ;
 And corners in't where store of pleasures lodge,
 We never dreamed were there ! It is to dwell
 'Mid smiles that are not neighbours to deceit ;
 Music whose melody is of the heart,
 And gifts that are not made for interest,—
 Abundantly bestowed by nature's cheek,
 And voice, and hand ! It is to live on life,
 And husband it ! It is to constant scan
 The handiwork of heaven ! It is to con
 Its mercy, bounty, wisdom, power ! It is
 To nearer see our God !

JULIA.

How like he talks
 To Master Walter ! Shall I give it o'er ?
 Not yet. Thou wouldst not live one half a year !

A quarter mightst thou for the novelty
Of fields and trees ; but then it needs must be
In summer time, when they go dress'd.

CLIFFORD.

Not it !

In any time—say winter ! Fields and trees
Have charms for me in very winter time.

JULIA.

But snow may clothe them then.

CLIFFORD,

I like them full
As well in snow.

JULIA.

You do ?

CLIFFORD.

I do !

JULIA.

But night
Will hide both snow and them, and that sets in
Ere afternoon is out. A heavy thing,
A country fireside in a winter's night,
To one bred in the town,—where winter's said,
For son of gaiety and sportiveness,
To beggar shining summer.

CLIFFORD.

I should like
A country winter's night especially !

JULIA.

You'd sleep by the fire.

CLIFFORD.

Not I ; I'd talk to thee.

JULIA.

You'd tire of that !

CLIFFORD.

I'd read to thee.

JULIA.

And that !

CLIFFORD.

I'd talk to thee again.

JULIA.

And sooner tire
Than first you did, and fall asleep at last.
You'd never do to lead a country life.

CLIFFORD.

You deal too harshly with me ! Matchless maid,
As lov'd instructor brightens dullest wit,
Fear not to undertake the charge of me !
A willing pupil kneels to thee, and lays
His title and his fortune at your feet.

JULIA.

His title and his fortune !

Enter MASTER WALTER and HELEN.—JULIA, disconcerted, retires with the latter.—CLIFFORD rises.

WALTER.

So, Sir Thomas!

Aha! you husband time! well, was I right?

Is't not the jewel that I told you 'twas?

Wouldst thou not give thine eyes to wear it? Eh?

It has an owner though,—nay, start not,—one

That may be brought to part with't, and with whom

I'll stand thy friend—I will—I say, I will!

A strange man, Sir, and unaccountable:

But I can humour him—will humour him

For thy sake, good Sir Thomas, for I like thee.

Well, is't a bargain? Come, thy hand upon it.

A word or two with thee. (*They retire. JULIA and HELEN come forward.*)

JULIA.

Go up to town!

HELEN.

Have I not said it ten times o'er to thee?

But if thou lik'st it not, protest against it.

JULIA.

Not if 'tis Master Walter's will.

HELEN.

What then?

Thou wouldst not break thy heart for Master Walter?

JULIA.

That follows not!

HELEN.

What follows not?

JULIA.

That I

Should break my heart, because we go to town.

HELEN.

Indeed!—O that's another matter. Well,

I'd e'en advise thee then to do his will;

And ever after when I prophesy,

Believe me, Julia! (*They retire. MASTER WALTER comes forward.*)

Enter FATHOM.

FATHOM.

So please you, Sir, a letter,—a post-haste letter! The bearer on horseback, the horse in a foam—smoking like a boiler at the heat—be sure a post-haste letter!

WALTER.

Look to the horse and rider. (*Opens the letter and reads.*)

What's this? A testament addressed to me,

Found in his lordship's escrutoire, and thence

Directed to be taken by no hand
But mine. My presence instantly required.

(SIR THOMAS, JULIA, and HELEN come forward.)

Come, my mistresses,
You dine in town to-day. Your father's will
It is, my Julia, that you see the world,
And thou shalt see it in its best attire.
Its gayest looks—its richest finery
It shall put on for thee, that thou may'st judge
Betwixt it, and the rural life you've lived.
Business of moment I'm but just advised of,
Touching the will of my late noble master,
The earl of Rochdale, recently deceas'd,
Commands me for a time to leave thee there.
Sir Thomas, hand her to the chariot. Nay,
I tell thee true. We go indeed to town!

[*Exeunt.*]

END OF FIRST ACT.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—AN APARTMENT IN MASTER HEARTWELL'S HOUSE.

—

Enter FATHOM and THOMAS.

THOMAS.

WELL, Fathom, is thy mistress up?

FATHOM.

She is, Master Thomas, and breakfasted.

THOMAS.

She stands it well! 'Twas five, you say, when she came home; and wants it now three quarters of an hour of ten? Wait till her stock of country health is out.

FATHOM.

'Twill come to that, Master Thomas, before she lives another month in town! three, four, five, six o'clock are now the hours she keeps. 'Twas otherwise with her in the country. There, my mistress used to rise what time she now lies down.

THOMAS.

Why, yes; she's changed since she came hither.

FATHOM.

Changed, do you say, Master Thomas? Changed forsooth! I know not the thing in which she is not changed, saving that she is

still a woman. I tell thee there is no keeping pace with her moods. In the country she had none of them. When I brought what she asked for, it was "Thank you, Fathom," and no more to do; but now, nothing contents her. Hark ye! were you a gentleman, Master Thomas,—for then you know you would be a different kind of man,—how many times would you have your coat altered?

THOMAS.

Why, Master Fathom, as many times as it would take to make it fit me.

FATHOM.

Good! But supposing it fitted thee at the first?

THOMAS.

Then would I have it altered not at all.

FATHOM.

Good! Thou wouldst be a reasonable gentleman. Thou wouldst have a conscience. Now hark to a tale about my lady's last gown. How many times, think you, took I it back to the sempstress?

THOMAS.

Thrice, may be.

FATHOM.

Thrice, may be! Twenty times, may be; and not a turn too many for the truth on't. Twenty times on the oath of the sempstress. Now mark me—can you count?

THOMAS.

After a fashion.

FATHOM.

You have much to be thankful for, Master Thomas; you London serving men have a world of things, which we in the country never dream of. Now mark:—four times took I it back for the flounce; twice for the sleeves; three for the tucker. How many times in all is that?

THOMAS.

Eight times to a fraction, Master Fathom.

FATHOM.

What a master of figures you are! Eight times—now recollect that! And then found she fault with the trimmings. Now tell me how many times took I back the gown for the trimmings?

THOMAS.

Eight times more, perhaps!

FATHOM.

Ten times to a certainty. How many times makes that?

THOMAS.

Eighteen, Master Fathom, by the rule of addition.

FATHOM.

And how many times more will make twenty?

THOMAS.

Twice, by the same rule.

FATHOM.

Thou hast worked with thy pencil and slate, Master Thomas!

Well, ten times, as I said, took I back the gown for the trimmings: and was she content after all? I warrant you no, or my ears did not pay for it. She wished, she said, that the slattern sempstress had not touched the gown, for nought had she done, but botched it. Now what think you had the sempstress done to the gown?

THOMAS.

To surmise that, I must be learned in the sempstress's art.

FATHOM.

The sempstress's art! Thou hast hit it! Oh, the sweet sempstress! The excellent sempstress! Mistress of her scissors and needles, which are pointless and edgeless to her art! The sempstress had done nothing to the gown, yet raves and storms my mistress at her for having botched it in the making and mending; and orders her straight to make another one, which home the sempstress brings on Tuesday last.

THOMAS.

And found thy fair mistress as many faults with that?

FATHOM.

Not one! She finds it a very pattern of a gown! A well sitting flounce! The sleeves a fit—the tucker a fit—the trimmings her fancy to a T—ha! ha! ha! and she praised the sempstress—ha! ha! ha! and she smiles at me, and I smile—ha! ha! ha! and the sempstress smiles—ha! ha! ha! Now why did the sempstress smile?

THOMAS.

That she had succeeded so well in her art.

FATHOM.

Thou hast hit it again. The jade must have been born a sempstress. If ever I marry she shall work for my wife. The gown was the same gown, and there was my mistress's twentieth mood!

THOMAS.

What think you will Master Walter say when he comes back? I fear he'll hardly know his country maid again. Has she yet fixed her wedding-day?

FATHOM.

She has, Master Thomas. I coaxed it from her maid. She marries, Monday week.

THOMAS.

Comes not Master Walter back to-day?

FATHOM.

Your master expects him. (*A ringing.*) Perhaps that's he. I prithee go and open the door; do, Master Thomas, do; for proves it my master, he'll surely question me.

THOMAS.

And what should I do?

FATHOM.

Answer him, Master Thomas, and make him none the wiser. He'll go mad, when he learns how my lady flaunts it! Go! open the door, I prithee. Fifty things, Master Thomas, know you, for one thing that I know; you can turn and twist a matter into any other kind of mat-

ter, and then twist and turn it back again, if needs be ; so much you servants of the town beat us of the country, Master Thomas. Open the door, now ; do, Master Thomas, do !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—A GARDEN WITH TWO ARBOURS.

Enter MASTER HEARTWELL *and* MASTER WALTER, *meeting.*

HEARTWELL.

Good Master Walter, welcome back again !

WALTER.

I'm glad to see you, Master Heartwell.

HEARTWELL.

How,
I pray you, sped the weighty business which
So sudden called you hence ?

WALTER.

Weighty, indeed !
What thou wouldst ne'er expect—wilt scarce believe !
Long hidden wrong, wondrously come to light,
And great right done ! But more of this anon.
Now of my ward discourse ! Likes she the town ?
How does she ? Is she well ? Canst match me her,
Amongst your city maids ?

HEARTWELL.

Nor court ones neither !
She far outstrips them all !

WALTER.

I knew she would.
What else could follow in a maid so bred ?
A pure mind, Master Heartwell !—not a taint
From intercourse with the distemper'd town ;
With which all contact was wall'd out ; until,
Matured in soundness, I could trust her to it,
And sleep amidst infection.

HEARTWELL.

Master Walter !

WALTER.

Well ?

HEARTWELL.

Tell me, prithee, which is likelier
To plough a sea in safety ?—he that's wont
To sail in it,—or he that by the chart
Is master of its soundings, bearings,—knows
Its headlands, havens, currents—where 'tis bold,
And where behoves to keep a good look-out.
The one will swim where sinks the other one ?

WALTER.

The drift of this ?

HEARTWELL.

Do you not guess it ?

WALTER.

Humph !

HEARTWELL.

If you would train a maid to live in town,
Breed her not in the country !

WALTER.

Say you so ?

And stands she not the test ?

HEARTWELL.

As snow stands fire !
Your country maid has melted all away,
And plays the city lady to the height :—
Her mornings gives to mercers, milliners,
Shoemakers, jewellers, and haberdashers ;
Her noons, to calls ; her afternoons, to dressing ;
Evenings, to plays and drums ; and nights, to routs,
Balls, masquerades ! Sleep only ends the riot,
Which waking still begins !

WALTER.

I'm all amaze !

How bears Sir Thomas this ?

HEARTWELL.

Why patiently ;

Though one can see with pain.

WALTER.

She loves him ? Ha !

That shrug is doubt ! She'd ne'er consent to wed him
Unless she loved him !—never ! Her young fancy
The pleasures of the town—new things—have caught.
Anon their hold will slacken ; she'll become
Her former self again ; to its old train
Of sober feelings will her heart return ;
And then she'll give it wholly to the man
Her virgin wishes chose !

HEARTWELL.

Here comes Sir Thomas ;
And with him Master Modus.

WALTER.

Let them pass :

I would not see him till I speak with her.

(They retire into one of the arbours.)

Enter CLIFFORD and MODUS.

CLIFFORD.

A dreadful question is it, when we love,
To ask if love's returned ! I did believe

Fair Julia's heart was mine—I doubt it now.
 But once last night she danced with me, her hand
 To this gallant and that engaged, as soon
 As asked for! Maid that loved would scarce do this?
 Nor visit we together as we used,
 When first she came to town. She loves me less
 Than once she did—or loves me not at all.

MODUS.

I'm little skilled, Sir Thomas, in the world:
 What mean you now to do?

CLIFFORD.

Remonstrate with her;
 Come to an understanding, and, at once,
 If she repents her promise to be mine,
 Absolve her from it—and say farewell to her.

MODUS.

Lo, then, your opportunity—she comes—
 My cousin also:—her will I engage,
 Whilst you converse together.

CLIFFORD.

Nay, not yet!
 My heart turns coward at the sight of her.
 Stay till it finds new courage! Let them pass.

(CLIFFORD and MODUS retire into the other arbour.)

Enter JULIA and HELEN.

HELEN.

So, Monday week will say good morn to thee
 A maid, and bid good night a sober wife!

JULIA.

That Monday week, I trust, will never come,
 That brags to make a sober wife of me!

HELEN.

How chang'd you are, my Julia!

JULIA.

Change makes change.

HELEN.

Why wedd'st thou then?

JULIA.

Because I promis'd him.

HELEN.

Thou lov'st him?

JULIA.

Do I?

HELEN.

He's a man to love:
 A right well-favour'd man!

JULIA.

Your point's well-favoured,
 Where did you purchase it? In Gracechurch-street?

HELEN.

Pshaw! never mind my point, but talk of him.

JULIA.

I'd rather talk with thee about the lace.
Where bought you it? In Gracechurch-street, Cheapside,
Whitechapel, Little Britain? Can't you say
Where 'twas you bought the lace?

HELEN.

In Cheapside, then.
And now then to Sir Thomas! He is just
The height I like a man.

JULIA.

Thy feather's just
The height I like a feather! Mine's too short!
What shall I give thee in exchange for it?

HELEN.

What shall I give thee for a minute's talk
About Sir Thomas?

JULIA.

Why, thy feather.

HELEN.

Take it!

CLIFFORD (*aside to MODUS*).

What, likes she not to speak of me!

HELEN.

And now
Let's talk about Sir Thomas—much I'm sure
He loves you.

JULIA.

Much I'm sure he has a right!
Those know I who would give their eyes to be
Sir Thomas, for my sake!

HELEN.

Such too, know I.
But 'mong them none that can compare with him,
Not one so graceful.

JULIA.

What a graceful set
Your feather has!

HELEN.

Nay give it back to me,
Unless you pay me for't.

JULIA.

What was't to get?

HELEN.

A minute's talk with thee about Sir Thomas.

JULIA.

Talk of his title, and his fortune then.

CLIFFORD (*aside*).

Indeed! I would not listen, yet I must!

JULIA.

An ample fortune, Helen—I shall be
A happy wife! What routs, what balls, what masques,
What gala days!

CLIFFORD (*aside*).

For these she marries me!
She'll talk of these!

JULIA.

Think not, when I am wed,
I'll keep the house as owlet does her tower,
Alone,—when every other bird's on wing.
I'll use my palfrey, Helen; and my coach;
My barge too for excursion on the Thames;
What drives to Barnet, Hackney, Islington!
What rides to Epping, Hounslow, and Blackheath!
What sails to Greenwich, Woolwich, Fulham, Kew!
I'll set a pattern to your lady wives!

CLIFFORD (*aside*).

Ay, lady? Trust me, not at my expense.

JULIA.

And what a wardrobe! I'll have change of suits
For every day in the year! and sets for days!
My morning dress, my noon dress, dinner dress,
And evening dress! then will I show you lace
A foot deep, can I purchase it; if not,
I'll speedily bespeak it. Diamonds too!
Not buckles, rings, and ear-rings only,—but
Whole necklaces and stomachers of gems!
I'll shine! be sure I will.

CLIFFORD (*aside*).

Then shine away;
Who covets thee may wear thee; I'm not he!

JULIA.

And then my title! Soon as I put on
The ring, I'm Lady Clifford. So I take
Precedence of plain mistress, where she e'en
The richest heiress in the land! At town
Or country ball, you'll see me take the lead,
While wives that carry on their backs the wealth
To dower a princess, shall give place to me;—
Will I not profit, think you, by my right?
Be sure I will! marriage shall prove to me
A never-ending pageant. Every day
Shall show how I am spous'd! I will be known
For Lady Clifford all the city through,
And fifty miles the country round about.
Wife of Sir Thomas Clifford, baronet,—
Not perishable knight! who, when he makes
A lady of me, doubtless must expect
To see me play the part of one.

CLIFFORD (*coming forward*).

Most true.

But not the part which you design to play.

JULIA.

A list'ner, Sir!

CLIFFORD.

By chance, and not intent.

Your speech was forced upon mine ear, that ne'er

More thankless duty to my heart discharged!

Would for that heart it ne'er had known the sense

Which tells it 'tis a bankrupt there, where most

It coveted to be rich, and thought it was so!

O Julia! is it you? Could I have set

A coronet upon that stately brow,

Where partial nature hath already bound

A brighter circlet—radiant beauty's own—

I had been proud to see thee proud of it,

So for the donor thou hadst ta'en the gift,

Not for the gift ta'en him. Could I have pour'd

The wealth of richest Cræsus in thy lap,

I had been blest to see thee scatter it,

So I was still thy riches paramount!

JULIA.

Know you me, Sir?

CLIFFORD.

I do! On Monday week

We were to wed, and are, so you're content

The day that weds, wives you to be widowed. Take

The privilege of my wife; be Lady Clifford!

Outshine the title in the wearing on't!

My coffers, lands, are all at thy command;

Wear all! but, for myself, she wears not me,

Although the coveted of every eye,

Who would not wear me for myself alone.

JULIA.

And do you carry it so proudly, Sir?

CLIFFORD.

Proudly, but still more sorrowfully, lady!

I'll lead thee to the church on Monday week.

Till then, farewell! and then,—farewell for ever!

O Julia, I have ventured for thy love,

As the bold merchant, who, for only hope

Of some rich gain, all former gains will risk.

Before I asked a portion of thy heart,

I peril'd all my own; and now, all's lost!

[*Exit* CLIFFORD.]

JULIA.

Helen!

HELEN.

What ails you, sweet!

JULIA.

I cannot breathe—quick, loose my girdle, oh! (*faints.*)

MASTER WALTER *and* MASTER HEARTWELL *come forward.*

WALTER.

Good Master Heartwell, help to take her in,

Whilst I make after him! and look to her!

Unlucky chance that took me out of town.

[*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE III.—THE STREET.

Enter CLIFFORD *and* STEPHEN, *meeting.*

STEPHEN.

Letters, Sir Thomas.

CLIFFORD.

Take them home again,
I shall not read them now.

STEPHEN.

Your pardon, Sir,
But here is one directed strangely.

CLIFFORD.

How?

STEPHEN.

“To Master Clifford, gentleman; now styled
Sir Thomas Clifford, baronet.”

CLIFFORD.

Indeed!
Whence comes that letter?

STEPHEN.

From abroad.

CLIFFORD.

Which is it?

STEPHEN.

So please you this, Sir Thomas.

CLIFFORD.

Give it me.

STEPHEN.

That letter brings not news to wish him joy upon. If he was disturbed before, which I guessed by his looks he was, he is not more at ease now. His hand to his head! A most unwelcome letter! If it brings him news of disaster, fortune does not give him his deserts; for never waited servant upon a kinder master.

CLIFFORD.

Stephen!

STEPHEN.

Sir Thomas!

CLIFFORD.

From my door remove
The plate that bears my name.

STEPHEN.

The plate, Sir Thomas !

CLIFFORD.

The plate—collect my servants and instruct them
To make out each their claims unto the end
Of their respective terms, and give them in
To my steward. Him and them apprise, good fellow,
That I keep house no more. As you go home
Call at my coachmaker's, and bid him stop
The carriage I bespoke. The one I have
Send with my horses to the mart whereat
Such things are sold by auction. They're for sale—
Pack up my wardrobe—have my trunks convey'd
To the Inn in the next street—and when that's done,
Go round my tradesmen and collect their bills,
And bring them to me, at the Inn.

STEPHEN.

The Inn !

CLIFFORD.

Yes ; I go home no more. Why, what's the matter ?
What has fallen out to make your eyes fill up ?
You'll get another place. I'll certify
You're honest and industrious, and all
That a servant ought to be.

STEPHEN.

I see, Sir Thomas,
Some great misfortune has befallen you ?

CLIFFORD.

No !

I have health ; I have strength ; my reason, Stephen, and
A heart that's clear in truth, with trust in God.
No great disaster can befall the man
Who's still possessed of these ! Good fellow, leave me.
What you would learn, and have a right to know,
I would not tell you now.—Good Stephen, hence !
Mischance has fallen on me—but what of that ?
Mischance has fallen on many a better man.
I prithee leave me. I grow sadder while
I see the eye with which you view my grief.
'Sdeath they will out ! I would have been a man,
Had you been less a kind and gentle one.
Now, as you love me, leave me.

STEPHEN.

Never master
So well deserv'd the love of him that serv'd him. [Exit STEPHEN.

CLIFFORD.

Misfortune liketh company : it seldom
Visits its friends alone. Ha, Master Walter,
And ruffled too ! I'm in no mood for him.

Enter MASTER WALTER.

WALTER.

So, Sir—Sir Thomas Clifford!—what with speed
And choler—I do gasp for want of breath!

CLIFFORD.

Well, Master Walter?

WALTER.

You're a rash young man, Sir!
Strong-headed, and wrong-headed—and I fear, Sir,
Not over delicate in that fine sense
Which men of honour pride themselves upon!

CLIFFORD.

Well, Master Walter?

WALTER.

A young woman's heart, Sir,
Is not a stone to carve a posy on!
Which knows not what is writ on't—which you may buy,
Exchange or sell, Sir,—keep or give away, Sir:
It is a richer—yet a poorer thing!
Priceless to him that owns and prizes it;
Worthless, when own'd, not prized; which makes the man
That covets it, obtains it, and discards it,—
A fool, if not a villain, Sir!

CLIFFORD.

Well, Sir!

WALTER.

You never lov'd my ward, Sir!

CLIFFORD.

The bright Heavens
Bear witness that I did!

WALTER.

The bright Heavens, Sir,
Bear not false witness. That you lov'd her not,
Is clear,—for had you lov'd her, you'd have pluck'd
Your heart from out your breast, ere cast her from your heart!
Old as I am, I know what passion is.
It is the summer's heat, Sir, which in vain
We look for frost in. Ice, like you, Sir, knows
But little of such heat! We are wrong'd, Sir: wrong'd!
You wear a sword, and so do I.

CLIFFORD.

Well, Sir!

WALTER.

You know the use, Sir, of a sword?

CLIFFORD.

I do.

To whip a knave, Sir, or an honest man!
A wise man or a fool—atone for wrong,
Or double the amount on't! Master Walter,

Touching your ward, if wrong is done, I think
 On my side lies the grievance. I would not say so
 Did I not think so. As for love—look, Sir,
 That hand's a widower's, to its first mate sworn
 To clasp no second one. As for amends, Sir,
 You're free to get them from a man in whom
 You've been forestall'd by fortune, for the spite
 Which she has vented on him, if you still
 Esteem him worth your anger. Please you read
 That letter. Now, Sir, judge if life is dear,
 To one so much a loser.

WALTER.

What, all gone!
 Thy cousin living they reported dead!

CLIFFORD.

Title and land, Sir, unto which add love;
 All gone, save life and honour, which ere I'll lose
 I'll let the other go.

WALTER.

We're public here,
 And may be interrupted. Let us seek
 Some spot of privacy. Your letter, Sir? (*gives it back.*)
 Though fortune slights you, I'll not slight you! not
 Your title or the lack of it I heed.
 Whether upon the score of love or hate
 With you and you alone I settle, Sir.
 We've gone too far. 'Twere folly now to part
 Without a reckoning.

CLIFFORD.

Just as you please.

WALTER.

You've done
 A noble lady wrong.

CLIFFORD.

That lady, Sir,
 Has done me wrong.

WALTER.

Go to! Thou art a boy
 Fit to be trusted with a plaything, not
 A woman's heart. Thou know'st not what it is!
 Which I will prove to thee, soon as we find
 Convenient place. Come on, Sir! you shall get
 A lesson that shall serve you for the rest
 Of your life. I'll make you own her, Sir, a piece
 Of Nature's handiwork, as costly, free
 From bias, flaw, and fair as ever yet
 Her cunning hand turn'd out. Come on, Sir! come!

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT III.

SCENE I.—A DRAWING ROOM.

Enter LORD TINSEL *and the* EARL OF ROCHDALE.

TINSEL.

REFUSE a lord! A saucy lady this.
I scarce can credit it.

ROCHDALE.

She'll change her mind.
My agent, Master Walter, is her guardian.

TINSEL.

How can you keep that Hunchback in his office?
He mocks you.

ROCHDALE.

He is useful. Never heed him.
My offer now do I present through him.
He has the title-deeds of my estates,
She'll listen to their wooing. I must have her.
Not that I love her, but all allow
She's fairest of the fair.

TINSEL.

Distinguish'd well:
'Twere most unseemly for a lord to love!—
Leave that to commoners. 'Tis vulgar—she's
Betroth'd, you tell me, to Sir Thomas Clifford.

ROCHDALE.

Yes.

TINSEL.

That a commoner should thwart a lord!
Yet not a commoner. A Baronet
Is fish and flesh. Nine parts plebeian, and
Patrician in the tenth. Sir Thomas Clifford!
A man, they say, of brains. I abhor brains
As I do tools; They're things mechanical.
So far are we above our forefathers:—
They to their brains did owe their titles, as
Do lawyers, doctors. We to nothing owe them,
Which makes us far the nobler.

ROCHDALE.

Is it so?

TINSEL.

Believe me. You shall profit by my training;
You grow a Lord apace. I saw you meet
A bevy of your former friends, who fain
Had shaken hands with you. You gave them fingers!
You're now another man. Your house is chang'd,—

Your table chang'd—your retinue—your horse—
Where once you rode a hack, you now back blood;—
Befits it then you also change your friends!

Enter WILLIAMS.

WILLIAMS.

A gentleman would see your lordship.

TINSEL.

Sir!

What's that?

WILLIAMS.

A gentleman would see his lordship.

TINSEL.

How know you, Sir, his lordship is at home?

Is he at home because he goes not out?

He's not at home, though there you see him, Sir,

Unless he certifies that he's at home!

Bring up the name of the gentleman, and then

Your lord will know if he's at home, or not.

[*Exit WILLIAMS.*

Your man was porter to some merchant's door,

Who never taught him better breeding

Than to speak the vulgar truth! Well, Sir?

WILLIAMS having re-entered.

WILLIAMS.

His name,

So please your lordship, Markham.

TINSEL.

Do you know

The thing?

ROCHDALE.

Right well! I'faith a hearty fellow,

Son to a worthy tradesman, who would do

Great things with little means; so enter'd him

In the Temple. A good-fellow ~~on~~ my life,

Nought smacking of his stock!

TINSEL.

You've said enough!

His lordship's not at home. (*Exit WILLIAMS.*) We do not go

By hearts, but orders! Had he family—

Blood—though it only were a drop—his heart

Would pass for something; lacking such desert,

Were it ten times the heart it is, 'tis nought!

Enter WILLIAMS.

WILLIAMS.

One Master Jones hath ask'd to see your lordship.

TINSEL.

And what was your reply to Master Jones?

WILLIAMS.

I knew not if his lordship was at home.

TINSEL.

You'll do. Who's Master Jones ?

ROCHDALE.

A curate's son.

TINSEL.

A curate's ? Better be a yeoman's son !
Was it the rector's son, he might be known,
Because the rector is a rising man,
And may become a bishop. He goes light.
The curate ever hath a loaded back,
He may be call'd the yeoman of the church
That sweating does his work, and drudges on
While lives the hopeful rector at his ease.
How made you his acquaintance, pray ?

ROCHDALE.

We read
Latin and Greek together.

TINSEL.

Dropping them—
As, now that you're a lord, of course you've done—
Drop him.—You'll say his lordship's not at home.

WILLIAMS.

So please your lordship, I forgot to say,
One Richard Cricket likewise is below.

TINSEL.

Who ? Richard Cricket ! You must see him, Rochdale '
A noble little fellow ! A great man, Sir !
Not knowing whom, you would be nobody !
I won five thousand pounds by him !

ROCHDALE.

Who is he ?
I never heard of him.

TINSEL.

What ! never heard
Of Richard Cricket ! never heard of him !
Why, he's the jockey of Newmarket ; you
May win a cup by him, or else a sweepstakes.
I bade him call upon you. You must see him.
His lordship is at home to Richard Cricket.

ROCHDALE.

Bid him wait in the ante-room.

[Exit WILLIAMS.]

TINSEL.

The ante-room !
The best room in your house ! You do not know
The use of Richard Cricket ! Show him, Sir,
Into the drawing-room. Your lordship needs
Must keep a racing stud, and you'll do well
To make a friend of Richard Cricket. Well, Sir,
What's that ?

Enter WILLIAMS.

WILLIAMS.

So please your lordship, a petition.

TINSEL.

Hadst not a service 'mongst the Hottentots
Ere thou cam'st hither, friend? Present thy lord
With a petition! At mechanics' doors,
At tradesmen's, shopkeepers', and merchants' only,
Have such things leave to knock! Make thy lord's gate
A wicket to a workhouse! Let us see it—
Subscriptions to a book of poetry!

Cornelius Tense A.M.

Which means he construes Greek and Latin, works
Problems in mathematics, can chop logic,
And is a conjuror in philosophy,
Both natural and moral.—Pshaw! a man
Whom nobody, that is any body, knows.
Who, think you, follows him? Why an M.D.,
An F.R.S., an F.A.S., and then
A D. D., Doctor of Divinity,
Ushering in an LL.D., which means
Doctor of Laws—their harmony, no doubt,
The difference of their trades! There's nothing here
But languages, and sciences, and arts,
Not an iota of nobility!
We cannot give our names. Take back the paper,
And tell the bearer there's no answer for him:—
That is the lordly way of saying "No."
But, talking of subscriptions, here is one
To which your lordship may affix your name.

ROCHDALE.

Pray, who's the object?

TINSEL.

A most worthy man!
A man of singular deserts; a man
In serving whom your lordship will serve me,—
Signor Cantata.

ROCHDALE.

He's a friend of yours?

TINSEL.

O, no, I know him not! I've not that pleasure.
But Lady Dangle knows him; she's his friend.
He will oblige us with a set of concerts,
Six concerts to the set.—The set three guineas.
Your lordship will subscribe?

ROCHDALE.

O, by all means.

TINSEL.

How many sets of tickets? Two at least.

You'll like to take a friend? I'll set you down
Six guineas to Signor Cantata's concerts.
And now, my Lord, we'll to him,—then we'll walk.

ROCHDALE.

Nay, I would wait the lady's answer.

TINSEL.

Wait! take an excursion to the country; let
Her answer wait for you.

ROCHDALE.

Indeed!

TINSEL.

Indeed!

Befits a lord nought like indifference
Say an estate should fall to you, you'd take it,
As it concerned more a stander by
Than you. As you're a lord, be sure you ever
Of that make little, other men make much of;
Nor do the thing they do, but the right contrary.
Where the distinction else 'twixt them and you?

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—AN APARTMENT IN MASTER
HEARTWELL'S HOUSE.

MASTER WALTER *discovered looking through title-deeds and papers.*

WALTER.

So falls out everything as I would have it,
Exact in place and time. This lord's advances
Receives she,—as, I augur, in the spleen
Of wounded pride she will,—my course is clear.
She comes—all's well—the tempest rages still.

(*JULIA enters, and paces the room in a state of high excitement.*)

JULIA.

What have my eyes to do with water? Fire
Becomes them better!

WALTER.

True.

JULIA.

Yet, must I weep
To be so monitor'd, and by a man!
A man that was my slave! whom I have seen
Kneel at my feet from morn till noon, content
With leave to only gaze upon my face,

And tell me what he read there,—till the page
 I knew by heart, I 'gan to doubt I knew,
 Emblazon'd by the comment of his tongue !
 And he to lesson me ! Let him come here
 On Monday week ! He ne'er leads me to church !
 I would not profit by his rank, or wealth,
 Though kings might call him cousin, for their sake !
 I'll show him I have pride !

WALTER.

You're very right !

JULIA.

He would have had to-day our wedding day !
 I fix'd a month from this. He pray'd and pray'd ;
 I dropp'd a week. He pray'd and pray'd the more !
 I dropp'd a second one. Still more he pray'd !
 And I took off another week,—and now
 I have his leave to wed, or not to wed !
 He'll see that I have pride !

WALTER.

And so he ought.

JULIA.

O ! for some way to bring him to my foot !
 But he should lie there ! Why, 'twill go abroad
 That he has cast me off. That there should live
 The man could say so ! Or that I should live
 To be the leavings of a man !

WALTER.

Thy case
 I own a hard one.

JULIA.

Hard ! 'Twill drive me mad !
 His wealth and title ! I refused a lord—
 I did ! that privily implored my hand,
 And never cared to tell him on't ! So much
 I hate him now, that lord should not in vain
 Implore my hand again !

WALTER.

You'd give it him ?

JULIA.

I would.

WALTER.

You'd wed that my lord ?

JULIA.

That lord I'd wed ;—
 Or any other lord,—only to show him
 That I could wed above him !

WALTER.

Give me your hand
 And word to that.

JULIA.

There! Take my hand and word!

WALTER.

That lord hath offered you his hand again.

JULIA.

He has?

WALTER.

Your father knows it: he approves of him.
 There are the title-deeds of the estates,
 Sent for my jealous scrutiny. All sound,—
 No flaw, or speck, that e'en the lynx-eyed law
 Itself could find. A lord of many lands!
 In Berkshire half a county; and the same
 In Wiltshire, and in Lancashire! Across
 The Irish Sea a principality!
 And not a rood with bond or lien on it!
 Wilt give that lord a wife? Wilt make thyself
 A countess? Here's the proffer of his hand.
 Write thou content, and wear a coronet!

JULIA (*eagerly*).

Give me the paper.

WALTER.

There! Here's pen and ink.
 Sit down. Why do you pause? A flourish of
 The pen, and you're a countess.

JULIA.

My poor brain
 Whirls round and round! I would not wed him now,
 Were he more lowly at my feet to sue
 Than e'er he did!

WALTER.

Wed whom?

JULIA.

Sir Thomas Clifford.

WALTER.

You're right.

JULIA.

His rank and wealth are roots to doubt;
 And while they lasted, still the weed would grow,
 Howe'er you pluck'd it. No! That's o'er—That's done.
 Was never lady wronged so foul as I! (*Weeps.*)

WALTER.

Thou'rt to be pitied.

JULIA (*aroused*).

Pitied! Not so bad
 As that.

WALTER.

Indeed thou art, to love the man
 That spurns thee!

JULIA.

Love him! Love! If hate could find
A word more harsh than its own name, I'd take it,
To speak the love I bear him! (*Weeps.*)

WALTER.

Write thy own name,
And show *him* how near akin thy hate's to hate.

JULIA (*writes*).

'Tis done!

WALTER.

'Tis well! I'll come to you anon!

[*Exit.*]JULIA (*alone*).

I'm glad 'tis done! I'm very glad 'tis done!
I've done the thing I ought. From my disgrace
This lord shall lift me 'bove the reach of scorn—
That idly wags his tongue, where wealth and state
Need only beckon to have crowds to laud!
Then how the tables change! The hand he spurn'd
His betters take! Let me remember that!
I'll grace my rank! I will! I'll carry it
As I was born to it! I warrant none
Shall say it fits me not:—but, one and all
Confess I wear it bravely, as I ought!
And he shall hear it! ay! and he shall see it!
I will roll by him in an equipage
Would mortgage his estate—but he shall own
His slight of me was my advancement! Love me!
He never lov'd me! if he had, he ne'er
Had given me up! Love's not a spider's web
But fit to mesh a fly—that you can break
By only blowing on't! He never lov'd me!
He knows not what love is—or, if he does,
He has not been o'er chary of his peace!
And that he'll find when I'm another's wife,
Lost!—lost to him for ever! Tears again!
Why should I weep for him? Who make their woes
Deserve them! what have I to do with tears?

Enter HELEN.

HELEN.

News, Julia, news!

JULIA.

What! is't about Sir Thomas?

HELEN.

Sir Thomas, say you? He's no more Sir Thomas!
That cousin lives, as heir to whom, his wealth
And title came to him.

JULIA.

Was he not dead?

HELEN.

No more than I am dead.

JULIA.

I would 'twere not so.

HELEN.

What say you, Julia?

JULIA.

Nothing!

HELEN.

I could kiss
That cousin! couldn't you, Julia?

JULIA.

Wherefore?

HELEN.

Why
For coming back to life again, as 'twere
Upon his cousin to revenge you.

JULIA.

Helen!

HELEN.

Indeed, 'tis true. With what a sorry grace
The gentleman will bear himself without
His title! Master Clifford! Have you not
Some token to return him? Some love-letter?
Some brooch? Some pin? Some anything? I'll be
Your messenger, for nothing but the pleasure
Of calling him plain "Master Clifford."

JULIA.

Helen!

HELEN.

Or has he aught of thine? Write to him, Julia,
Demanding it! Do, Julia, if you love me;
And I'll direct it in a schoolboy's hand,
As round as I can write, "To Master Clifford."

JULIA.

Helen!

HELEN.

I'll think of fifty thousand ways
To mortify him! I've a twentieth cousin,
A care-for-nought at mischief. Him I'll set,
With twenty other madcaps like himself,
To walk the streets the traitor most frequents,
And give him salutation as he passes—
"How do you, Master Clifford?"JULIA (*highly incensed*).

Helen!

HELEN.

Bless me!

JULIA.

I hate you, Helen!

Enter MODUS.

MODUS.

Joy for you, fair lady !
Our baronet is now plain gentleman,
And hardly that, not master of the means
To bear himself as such ! The kinsman lives
Whose only rumour'd death gave wealth to him,
And title. A hard creditor he proves,
Who keeps strict reckoning—will have interest,
As well as principal. A ruin'd man
Is now Sir Thomas Clifford.

HELEN.

I'm glad on't.

MODUS.

And so am I. A scurvy trick it was
He serv'd you, Madam. Use a lady so !
I merely bore with him. I never lik'd him.

HELEN.

No more did I. No, never could I think
He look'd his title.

MODUS.

No, nor acted it.
If rightly they report, he ne'er disburs'd
To entertain his friends, 'tis broadly said,
A hundred pounds in the year. He was most poor
In the appointments of a man of rank,
Possessing wealth like his. His horses, hacks !
His gentleman, a footman ! and his footman,
A groom ! The sports that men of quality
And spirit countenance, he kept aloof from,
From scruple of economy, not taste,—
As racing and the like. In brief, he lack'd
Those shining points that, more than name, denote
High breeding : and, moreover, was a man
Of very shallow learning.

JULIA.

Silence, Sir !
For shame !

HELEN.

Why Julia !

JULIA.

Speak not to me ! Poor !
Most poor ! I tell you, Sir, he was the making
Of fifty gentlemen—each one of whom
Were more than peer for thee ! His title, Sir,
Lent him no grace he did not pay it back !
Though it had been the highest of the high
He would have look'd it, felt it, acted it,
As thou could'st ne'er have done ! When found you out

You lik'd him not? It was not ere to-day!
 Or that base spirit I must reckon your's
 Which smiles where it would scowl—can stoop to hate
 And fear to show it! He was your better, Sir,
 And is!—Ay, is! though stripped of rank and wealth
 His nature's 'bove or fortune's love or spite,
 To blazon or to blur it! (*retires.*)

MODUS (*to HELEN*).

I was told
 Much to disparage him—I know not wherefore.

HELEN.

And so was I, and know as much the cause.

Enter MASTER WALTER with parchments.

WALTER.

Joy, my Julia!
 Impatient love has foresight! Lo you here
 The marriage deeds fill'd up, except a blank
 To write your jointure. What you will, my girl!
 Is this a lover? Look! Three thousand pounds
 Per annum for your private charges! Ha!
 There's pin money! Is this a lover? Mark
 What acres, forests, tenements, are tax'd
 For your revenue; and so set apart,
 That finger cannot touch them, save thine own.
 Is this a lover? What good fortune's thine!
 Thou dost not speak; but, 'tis the way with joy!
 With richest heart, it has the poorest tongue!

MODUS.

What great good fortune's this you speak of, Sir?

WALTER.

A coronet, Master Modus! You behold
 The wife elect, Sir, of no less a man
 Than the new Earl of Rochdale—heir of him
 That's recently deceased.

HELEN.

My dearest Julia,
 Much joy to you!

MODUS.

All good attend you, Madam!

WALTER.

This letter brings excuses from his lordship,
 Whose absence it accounts for. He repairs
 To his estate in Lancashire, and thither
 We follow.

JULIA.

When, Sir?

WALTER.

Now. This very hour.

JULIA.

This very hour! Oh cruel, fatal haste!

WALTER.

“ O cruel, fatal haste ! ” What meanest thou ?
 Have I done wrong to do thy bidding, then ?
 I have done no more. Thou wast an off-cast bride,
 And would'st be an affianc'd one—thou art so !
 Thou'dst have the slight that mark'd thee out for scorn,
 Converted to a means of gracing thee—
 It is so ! If our wishes come too soon,
 What can make sure of welcome ? In my zeal
 To win thee thine, thou know'st, at any time
 I'd play the steed, whose will to serve his lord,
 With his last breath gives his last bound for him !
 Since only noon have I despatch'd what well
 Had kept a brace of clerks, and more, on foot,—
 And then, perhaps, had been to do again !—
 Not finish'd, sure, complete—the compact firm,
 As fate itself had seal'd it !

JULIA.

Give you thanks !
 Though 'twere my death ! my death !

WALTER.

Thy death ! Indeed,
 For happiness like this, one well might die !
 Take thy lord's letter ! Well ?

Enter THOMAS with a letter.

THOMAS.

This letter, Sir,
 The gentleman that serv'd Sir Thomas Clifford—
 Or him that was Sir Thomas—gave to me
 For Mistress Julia.

JULIA.

Give it me ! (*Throwing away the one she holds.*)

WALTER (*snatching it*).

For what ?
 Would'st read it ? He's a bankrupt ! stripp'd of title,
 House, chattels, lands and all ? A naked bankrupt,
 With neither purse, nor trust ! Would'st read his letter ?
 A beggar ! Yea, a beggar ! fasts, unless
 He dines on alms ! How durst he send thee a letter !
 A fellow cut on this hand, and on that ;
 Bows and is cut again, and bows again !
 Who pays you fifty smiles for half a one,—
 And that given grudgingly ! To send you letter !
 I burst with choler ! Thus I treat his letter !

(Tears and throws it on the ground.)

So ! I was wrong to let him ruffle me ;
 He is not worth the spending anger on !
 I prithee, Master Modus, use despatch,
 And presently make ready for our ride.
 You, Helen, to my Julia look—a change

Of dresses will suffice. She must have new ones,
Matches for her new state! Haste, friends. My Julia!
Why stand you poring there upon the ground?
Time flies. Your rise astounds you? Never heed—
You'll play my lady countess like a queen!

[*Exeunt.*]

END OF THIRD ACT.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—A ROOM IN THE EARL OF ROCHDALE'S.

Enter HELEN.

HELEN.

I'M weary wandering from room to room;
A castle after all is but a house—
The dullest one when lacking company.
Were I at home I could be company
Unto myself. I see not Master Walter.
He's ever with his ward. I see not her.
By Master Walter will she bide, alone.
My father stops in town. I can't see him.
My cousin makes his books his company.
I'll go to bed and sleep. No—I'll stay up
And plague my cousin into making love!
For, that he loves me, shrewdly I suspect.
How dull he is that hath not sense to see
What lies before him, and he'd like to find.
I'll change my treatment of him. Cross him, where
Before I used to humour him. He comes,
Poring upon a book. What's that you read?

Enter MODUS.

MODUS.

Latin, sweet cousin.

HELEN.

'Tis a naughty tongue
I fear, and teaches men to lie.

MODUS.

To lie!

HELEN.

You study it. You call your cousin sweet,
And treat her as you would a crab. As sour
'Twould seem you think her, so you covet her!
Why how the monster stares, and looks about!
You construe Latin, and can't construe that.

MODUS.

I never studied women.

HELEN.

No; nor men.

Else would you better know their ways: nor read

In presence of a lady.

(Strikes the book from his hand.)

MODUS.

Right you say,

And well you served me, cousin, so to strike

The volume from my hand. I own my fault;

So please you,—may I pick it up again?

I'll put it in my pocket!

HELEN.

Pick it up.

He fears me as I were his grandmother!

What is the book?

MODUS.

'Tis Ovid's Art of Love.

HELEN.

That Ovid was a fool!

MODUS.

In what?

HELEN.

In that.

To call that thing an art, which art is none.

MODUS.

And is not love an art?

HELEN.

Are you a fool,

As well as Ovid? Love an art! No art

But taketh time and pains to learn. Love comes

With neither. Is't to hoard such grain as that,

You went to college? Better stay at home,

And study homely English.

MODUS.

Nay, you know not

The argument.

HELEN.

I don't? I know it better

Than ever Ovid did! The face,—the form,—

The heart,—the mind we fancy, cousin; that's

The argument! Why, cousin, you know nothing.

Suppose a lady were in love with thee,

Couldst thou by Ovid, cousin, find it out?

Couldst find it out, wast thou in love thyself?

Could Ovid, cousin, teach thee to make love?

I could, that never read him. You begin

With melancholy; then to sadness; then

To sickness; then to dying—but not die!

She would not let thee, were she of my mind;

She'd take compassion on thee. Then for hope;

From hope to confidence ; from confidence
 To boldness ;—then you'd speak ; at first entreat ;
 Then urge ; then flout ; then argue ; then enforce ;
 Make prisoner of her hand ; besiege her waist ;
 Threaten her lips with storming ; keep thy word
 And carry her ! My sampler 'gainst thy Ovid !
 Why cousin, are you frighten'd, that you stand
 As you were stricken dumb ? The case is clear,
 You are no soldier. You'll ne'er win a battle.
 You care too much for blows !

MODUS.

You wrong me there.
 At school I was the champion of my form,
 And since I went to college—

HELEN.

That for college !

MODUS.

Nay, hear me !

HELEN.

Well ? What, since you went to college ?
 You know what men are set down for, who boast
 Of their own bravery. Go on, brave cousin,
 What, since you went to college ? Was there not
 One Quentin Halworth there ? You know there was,
 And that he was your master !

MODUS.

He my master !
 Thrice was he worsted by me.

HELEN.

Still was he
 Your master.

MODUS.

He allow'd I had the best !
 Allow'd it, mark me ! nor to me alone,
 But twenty I could name.

HELEN.

And master'd you
 At last ! Confess it, cousin, 'tis the truth.
 A proctor's daughter you did both affect—
 Look at me and deny it ! Of the twain
 She more affected you ;—I've caught you now,
 Bold cousin ! Mark you ? opportunity
 On opportunity she gave you, Sir,—
 Deny it if you can !—but though to others,
 When you discours'd of her, you were a flame ;
 To her you were a wick that would not light,
 Though held in the very fire ! And so he won her—
 Won her, because he woo'd her like a man.
 For all your cuffings, cuffing you again
 With most usurious interest. Now, Sir,
 Protest that you are valiant !

MODUS.

Cousin Helen !

HELEN.

Well, Sir ?

MODUS.

The tale is all a forgery !

HELEN.

A forgery !

MODUS.

From first to last ; ne'er spoke I
To a proctor's daughter while I was at college—

HELEN.

'Twas a scrivener's then—or somebody's.
But what concerns it whose ? Enough, you lov'd her !
And, shame upon you, let another take her !

MODUS.

Cousin, I tell you, if you'll only hear me,
I lov'd no woman while I was at College—
Save one, and her I fancied ere I went there.

HELEN.

Indeed ! Now I'll retreat, if he's advancing.
Comes he not on ! O what a stock's the man ?
Well, cousin ?

MODUS.

Well ! What more would'st have me say ?
I think I've said enough.

HELEN.

And so think I.
I did but jest with you. You are not angry ?
Shake hands ! Why, cousin, do you squeeze me so ?
MODUS (*letting her go*).

I swear I squeezed you not !

HELEN.

You did not ?

MODUS.

No,
I'll die if I did !

HELEN.

Why then you did not, cousin,
So let's shake hands again—(*he takes her hand as before.*) O go
and now

Read Ovid ! Cousin, will you tell me one thing.
Wore lovers ruffs in master Ovid's time ?
Behov'd him teach them, then, to put them on ;—
And that you have to learn. Hold up your head !
Why cousin, how you blush. Plague on the ruff !
I cannot give't a set. You're blushing still !
Why do you blush, dear cousin ? So !—'twill beat me !
I'll give it up.

MODUS.

Nay, prithee don't —try on !

HELEN.

And if I do, I fear you'll think me bold.

MODUS.

For what?

HELEN.

To trust my face so near to thine.

MODUS.

I know not what you mean.

HELEN.

I'm glad you don't!

Cousin, I own right well behaved you are,
Most marvellously well behaved! They've bred
You well at college. With another man
My lips would be in danger! Hang the ruff!

MODUS.

Nay, give it up, nor plague thyself, dear cousin.

HELEN.

Dear fool! (*throws the ruff on the ground.*)

I swear the ruff is good for just
As little as its master! There!—'Tis spoil'd—
You'll have to get another. Hie for it,
And wear it in the fashion of a wisp,
Ere I adjust it for thee! Farewell, cousin!
You'd need to study Ovid's Art of Love.

[*Exit HELEN.*MODUS (*solus*).

Went she in anger! I will follow her,—
No, I will not! Heigho! I love my cousin!
O would that she lov'd me! Why did she taunt me
With backwardness in love? What could she mean?
Sees she I love her, and so laughs at me,
Because I lack the front to woo her? Nay,
I'll woo her then! Her lips shall be in danger,
When next she trusts them near me! Look'd she at me
'To-day, as never did she look before!
A bold heart, Master Modus! 'Tis a saying,
A faint one never won fair lady yet!
I'll woo my cousin, come what will on't! Yes:
(*begins reading again, throws down the book.*)
Hang Ovid's Art of Love! I'll woo my cousin!

SCENE II.—THE BANQUETING ROOM IN THE
EARL OF ROCHDALE'S MANSION.

Enter MASTER WALTER and JULIA.

WALTER.

This is the banqueting room. Thou see'st as far
It leaves the last behind, as that excels
The former ones. All is proportion here
And harmony! Observe! The massy pillars

May well look proud to bear the gilded dome.
 You mark those full-length portraits? They're the heads,
 The stately heads, of his ancestral line.
 Here o'er the feast they aptly still preside!
 Mark those medallions! Stand they forth or not
 In bold and fair relief? Is not this brave?

JULIA (*abstractedly*).

It is.

WALTER.

It should be so. To cheer the blood
 That flows in noble veins is made the feast
 That gladdens here! You see this drapery?
 'Tis richest velvet! Fringe and tassels, gold!
 Is not this costly?

JULIA.

Yes.

WALTER.

And chaste, the while?
 Both chaste and costly?

JULIA.

Yes.

WALTER.

Come hither! There's a mirror for you. See!
 One sheet from floor to ceiling! Look into it,
 Salute its mistress! Dost not know her?

JULIA (*sighing deeply*).

Yes!

WALTER.

And sighest thou to know her? Wait until
 To-morrow, when the banquet shall be spread
 In the fair hall; the guests—already bid,
 Around it; here, her lord; and there, herself;
 Presiding o'er the cheer that hails him bridegroom,
 And her the happy bride! Dost hear me?

JULIA (*sighing still more deeply*).

Yes.

WALTER.

These are the day rooms only, we have seen,
 For public and domestic uses kept.
 I'll show you now the lodging rooms. (*Goes, then turns and ob-*
serves JULIA *standing perfectly abstracted.*)

You're tired.

Let it be till after dinner then. Yet one
 I'd like thee much to see—the bridal chamber.

(JULIA *starts, crosses her hands upon her*
breast, and looks upwards.)

I see you're tired: yet it is worth the viewing,
 If only for the tapestry which shows
 The needle like the pencil glows with life;

(*Brings down chairs, they sit.*)

The story's of a page who lov'd the dame
 He served—a princess!—Love's a heedless thing!
 That never takes account of obstacles;
 Makes plains of mountains, rivulets of seas,
 That part it from its wish. So proved the page,
 Who from a state so lowly looked so high,—
 But love's a greater lackwit still than this.
 Say it aspires—that's gain! Love stoops—that's loss!
 You know what comes. The princess lov'd the page.
 Shall I go on, or here leave off?

JULIA.

Go on.

WALTER.

Each side of the chamber shows a different stage
 Of this fond page, and fonder lady's love*.
 First—no, it is not that.

JULIA.

O, recollect!

WALTER.

And yet it is!

JULIA.

No doubt it is. What is't?

WALTER.

He holds to her a salver, with a cup:
 His cheek more mantling with his passion, than
 The cup with the ruby wine. She heeds him not,
 For too great heed of him:—but seems to hold
 Debate betwixt her passion and her pride,
 That's like to lose the day. You read it in
 Her vacant eye, knit brow, and parted lips,
 Which speak a heart too busy all within
 To note what's done without. Like you the tale?

JULIA.

I list to every word.

WALTER.

The next side paints

* In representation, the passages following this are curtailed—and the scene runs as follows:—Master Walter continues—

The first side shows their passion in the dawn—
 In the next side 'tis shining open day—
 In the third there's clouding,—I but touch on these
 To make a long tale brief, and bring thee to
 The last side.

JULIA.

What shows that?

WALTER.

The fate of love
 That will not be advised.—The scene's a dungeon,
 It's tenant is the page—he lies in fetters.

JULIA.

Hard!

Hard as the steel, the hands that put them on! &c.

The page upon his knee. He has told his tale ;
 And found that, when he lost his heart, he play'd
 No losing game ; but won a richer one !
 There may you read in him, how love would seem
 Most humble when most bold,—you question which
 Appears to kiss her hand—his breath, or lips !
 In her you read how wholly lost is she
 Who trusts her heart to love. Shall I give o'er ?

JULIA.

Nay, tell it to the end. Is't melancholy ?

WALTER.

To answer that, would mar the story.

JULIA.

Right.

WALTER.

The third side now we come to.

JULIA.

What shows that ?

WALTER.

The page and princess still. But stands her sire
 Between them. Stern he grasps his daughter's arm,
 Whose eyes like fountains play ; while thro' her tears
 Her passion shines, as thro' the fountain drops,
 The sun ! His minions crowd around the page !
 They drag him to a dungeon.

JULIA.

Hapless youth !

WALTER.

Hapless indeed, that's twice a captive ! heart
 And body both in bonds. But that's the chain,
 Which balance cannot weigh, rule measure, touch
 Define the texture of, or eye detect,
 That's forged by the subtle craft of love !
 No need to tell you that he wears it. Such
 The cunning of the hand that plied the loom,
 You've but to mark the straining of his eye,
 To feel the coil yourself !

JULIA.

I feel't without !

You've finished with the third side ; now the fourth !

WALTER.

It brings us to a dungeon, then.

JULIA.

The page,
 The thrall of love, more than the dungeon's thrall,
 Is there ?

WALTER.

He is. He lies in fetters.

JULIA.

Hard !—

Hard as the steel the hands that put them on.

WALTER.

Some one unrivets them!

JULIA.

The princess? 'Tis!

WALTER.

It is another page.

JULIA.

It is herself!

WALTER.

Her skin is fair ; and his is berry-brown.
His locks are raven black ; and hers are gold.

JULIA.

Love's cunning of disguises ! spite of locks,
Skin, vesture,—it is she, and only she !
What will not constant woman do for love
That's lov'd with constancy ! Set her the task,
Virtue approving, that will baffle her !
O'ertax her stooping, patience, courage, wit !
My life upon it, 'tis the princess' self,
Transformed into a page !

WALTER.

The dungeon door
Stands open, and you see beyond—

JULIA.

Her father !

WALTER.

No ; a steed.

JULIA (*starting up*).

O, welcome steed,
My heart bounds at the thought of thee ! Thou com'st
To bear the page from bonds to liberty.
What else ?

WALTER (*rising*).

The story's told.

JULIA.

Too briefly told ;
O happy princess, that had wealth and state
To lay them down for love ! Whose constant love
Appearances approved, not falsified !
A winner in thy loss as well as gain.

WALTER.

Weighs love so much ?

JULIA.

What would you weigh 'gainst love
That's true ? Tell me with what you'd turn the scale ?
Yea, make the index waver ? Wealth ? A feather !
Rank ? Tinsel against bullion in the balance !
The love of kindred ? That to set 'gainst love !
Friendship comes nearest to't ; but put it in,
Friendship will kick the beam !—weigh nothing 'gainst it !

Weigh love against the world !
 Yet are they happy that have nought to say to it.

WALTER.

And such a one art thou. Who wisely wed,
 Wed happily. The love thou speak'st of
 A flower is only, that its season has
 Which they must look to see the withering of,
 Who pleasure in its budding and its bloom !
 But wisdom is the constant evergreen
 Which lives the whole year through ! Be that your flower !

Enter a SERVANT.

Well ?

SERVANT.

My Lord's secretary is without.
 He brings a letter for her ladyship,
 And craves admittance to her.

WALTER.

Show him in.

JULIA.

No !

WALTER.

Thou must see him. To show slight to him,
 Were slighting him that sent him. Show him in ! [*Exit SERVANT.*
 Some errand proper for thy private ear,
 Besides the letter he may bring. What mean
 This paleness and this trembling ? Mark me, Julia !
 If, from these nuptials, which thyself invited—
 Which, at thy seeking, came—thou would'st be freed,
 Thou hast gone too far ! Receding were disgrace,
 Sooner than see thee suffer which, the hearts
 That love thee most, would wish thee dead ! Reflect !
 Take thought ! Collect thyself ! With dignity
 Receive thy bridegroom's messenger ! for sure
 As dawns to-morrow's sun, to-morrow night
 Sees thee a wedded bride !

[*Exit.*

JULIA (*alone*).

A wedded bride !
 Is't a dream ? Is't a phantasm ? 'Tis
 Too horrible for reality ! for aught else
 Too palpable ! O would it were a dream !
 How would I bless the sun that wak'd me from it !
 I perish ! Like some desperate mariner
 Impatient of a strange and hostile land,
 Who rashly hoists his sail, and puts to sea,
 And being fast on reefs and quicksands borne,
 Essays in vain once more to make the land,
 Whence wind and current drive him,—I'm wreck'd
 By mine own act ! What ! no escape ? no hope ?
 None ! I must e'en abide these hated nuptials !

Hated!—Ah! own it, and then curse thyself!
 That mad'st the bane thou loathest—for the love
 Thou bear'st to one who never can be thine!
 Yes—love! Deceive thyself no longer. False
 To say 'tis pity for his fall,—respect,
 Engender'd by a hollow world's disdain,
 Which hoots whom fickle fortune cheers no more!
 'Tis none of these: 'tis love—and if not love,
 Why then idolatry! Ay, that's the name
 To speak the broadest, deepest, strongest passion,
 That ever woman's heart was borne away by!
 He comes! Thou'dst play the lady,—play it now!

*Enter a SERVANT, conducting CLIFFORD, plainly attired as the
 EARL OF ROCHDALE'S Secretary.*

SERVANT.

His lordship's secretary.

[*Exit Servant.*]

JULIA.

Speaks he not?
 Or does he wait for orders to unfold
 His business? Stopp'd his business till I spoke,
 I'd hold my peace for ever!

(*CLIFFORD kneels; presenting a letter.*)

Does he kneel?

A lady am I to my heart's content!
 Could he unmake me that which claims his knee,
 I'd kneel to him,—I would! I would!—Your will?

CLIFFORD.

This letter from my lord.

JULIA.

O fate! who speaks?

CLIFFORD.

The secretary of my lord.

JULIA.

I breathe!

I could have sworn 'twas he!

(*Makes an effort to look at him, but is unable.*)

So like the voice—

I dare not look, lest there the form should stand!
 How came he by that voice? 'Tis Clifford's voice,
 If ever Clifford spoke! My fears come back—
 Clifford the secretary of my lord!

Fortune hath freaks, but none so mad as that!

It cannot be—it should not be!—a look,

And all were set at rest. (*Tries to look at him again, but cannot.*)

So strong my fears,

Dread to confirm them takes away the power

To try and end them! Come the worst, I'll look. (*She tries
 again; and again is unequal to the task.*)

I'd sink before him, if I met his eye!

Mean you yourself? Are you that burthen, Julia?
 Say that the sun's a burthen to the earth!
 Say that the blood's a burthen to the heart!
 Say health's a burthen, peace, contentment, joy,
 Fame, riches, honours! every thing that man
 Desires, and gives the name of blessing to!—
 E'en such a burthen, Julia were to me,
 Had fortune let me wear her.

JULIA (*aside*).

On the brink
 Of what a precipice I'm standing! Back,
 Back! while the faculty remains to do't!
 A minute longer, not the whirlpool's self
 More sure to suck thee down! One effort! There!

(*She returns to her seat, recovers her self-possession, takes up the letter, and reads.*)

To wed to-morrow night! Wed whom? A man
 Whom I can never love! I should before
 Have thought of that. To-morrow night! This hour
 To-morrow! How I tremble! Happy bands
 To which my heart such freezing welcome gives,
 As sends an ague through me! At what means
 Will not the desperate snatch! What's honour's price?
 Nor friends, nor lovers,—no, nor life itself!

Clifford! This moment leave me! (*CLIFFORD retires up the stage out of JULIA'S sight.*)

Is he gone!

O docile lover! Do his mistress' wish
 That went against his own! Do it so soon!—
 Ere well 'twas utter'd! No good-bye to her!
 No word! no look! 'Twas best that he so went!

Alas, the strait of her, who owns that best,
 Which last she'd wish were done? What's left me now?

To weep! To weep! (*Leans her head upon her arm, which rests upon the desk,—her other arm hanging listlessly at her side. CLIFFORD comes down the stage, looks a moment at her, approaches her, and kneeling, takes her hand.*)

CLIFFORD.

My Julia!

JULIA.

Here again,
 Up! up! By all thy hopes of heaven go hence!
 To stay's perdition to me! Look you, Clifford!
 Were there a grave where thou art kneeling now,
 I'd walk into't, and be inearth'd alive,
 Ere taint should touch my name! Should some one come
 And see thee kneeling thus! Let go my hand!
 Remember, Clifford, I'm a promis'd bride—
 And take thy arm away! It has no right
 To clasp my waist! Judge you so poorly of me,

As think I'll suffer this? My honour, Sir!

(She breaks from him, quitting her seat.)

I'm glad you've forc'd me to respect myself—

You'll find that I can do so!

CLIFFORD.

I was bold—

Forgetful of your station and my own;

There was a time I held your hand unchid!

There was a time I might have clasp'd your waist—

I had forgot that time was past and gone!

I pray you, pardon me!

JULIA *(softened)*.

I do so, Clifford.

CLIFFORD.

I shall no more offend.

JULIA.

Make sure of that.

No longer is it fit thou keep'st thy post

In's lordship's household. Give it up! A day—

An hour remain not in it!

CLIFFORD.

Wherefore?

JULIA.

Live

In the same house with me, and I another's?

Put miles, put leagues between us! The same land

Should not contain us. Oceans should divide us—

With barriers of constant tempests—such

As mariners durst not tempt! O Clifford!

Rash was the act so light that gave me up,

That stung a woman's pride, and drove her mad—

'Till in her frenzy she destroyed her peace!

O, it was rashly done! Had you reprov'd—

Expostulated,—had you reason'd with me—

Tried to find out what was indeed my heart,—

I would have shown it—you'd have seen it. All

Had been as nought can never be again!

CLIFFORD.

Lov'st thou me, Julia?

JULIA.

Dost thou ask me, Clifford?

CLIFFORD.

These nuptials may be shunn'd—

JULIA.

With honour?

CLIFFORD.

Yes.

JULIA.

Then take me! Stop—hear me, and take me then!

Let not thy passion be my counsellor!

CLIFFORD.

Wilt please your ladyship to take the letter?

JULIA.

There Clifford speaks again! Not Clifford's heart
 Could more make Clifford's voice! Not Clifford's tongue
 And lips more frame it into Clifford's speech!
 A question, and 'tis over! Know I you?

CLIFFORD.

Reverse of fortune, lady, changes friends:
 It turns them into strangers. What I am
 I have not always been!

JULIA.

Could I not name you?

CLIFFORD.

If your disdain for one, perhaps too bold
 When hollow fortune called him favourite,—
 Now by her fickleness perforce reduced
 To take an humble tone, would suffer you—

JULIA.

I might?

CLIFFORD.

You might!

JULIA.

O Clifford! is it you?

CLIFFORD

Your answer to my lord. (*Gives the letter.*)

JULIA.

Your lord! (*Mechanically taking it.*)

CLIFFORD.

Wilt write it?

Or, will it please you send a verbal one?
 I'll bear it faithfully.

JULIA.

You'll bear it?

CLIFFORD.

Madam,
 Your pardon, but my haste is somewhat urgent.
 My lord's impatient, and to use despatch
 Were his repeated orders.

JULIA.

Orders? Well,
 I'll read the letter, Sir. 'Tis right you mind
 His lordship's orders. They are paramount!
 Nothing should supersede them!—stand beside them!
 They merit all your care, and have it! Fit,
 Most fit they should! Give me the letter, Sir.

CLIFFORD.

You have it, Madam.

JULIA.

So! How poor a thing

I look ! so lost, while he is all himself !
 Have I no pride ? (*She rings, the Servant enters.*)
 Paper, and pen and ink !
 If he can freeze, 'tis time that I grow cold !
 I'll read the letter. (*Opens it and holds it as about to read it.*)
 Mind his orders ! So !
 Quickly he fits his habits to his fortunes !
 He serves my lord with all his will ! His heart's
 In his vocation. So ! Is this the letter ?
 'Tis upside down—and here I'm poring on't !
 Most fit I let him see me play the fool !
 Shame. Let me be myself !

(*A Servant enters with materials for writing.*)

A table, Sir,
 And chair. (*The servant brings a table and chair, and goes out.*
She sits awhile, vacantly gazing on the letter—
then looks at CLIFFORD.)

How plainly shows his humble suit !
 It fits not him that wears it ! I have wronged him !
 He can't be happy—does not look it ! is not.
 That eye which reads the ground is argument
 Enough ! He loves me. There I let him stand,
 And I am sitting ! (*Rises, takes a chair, and approaches CLIFFORD.*)
 Pray you take a chair. (*He bows as acknowledging and declining*
the honour. She looks at him awhile.)
 Clifford, why don't you speak to me ? (*She weeps.*)

CLIFFORD.

I trust
 You're happy.

JULIA.

Happy ! Very very happy !
 You see I weep, I am so happy ! Tears
 Are signs, you know, of nought but happiness !
 When first I saw you, little did I look
 To be so happy ! Clifford !

CLIFFORD.

Madam ?

JULIA.

Madam ;
 I call thee Clifford, and thou call'st me madam !

CLIFFORD.

Such the address my duty stints me to.
 Thou art the wife elect of a proud Earl—
 Whose humble secretary sole, am I.

JULIA.

Most right ! I had forgot ! I thank you, Sir,
 For so reminding me ; and give you joy,
 That what, I see, had been a burthen to you,
 Is fairly off your hands.

CLIFFORD.

A burthen to me !

Deal with me, Clifford, as my brother. Be
 The jealous guardian of my spotless name !
 Scan thou my cause as 'twere thy sister's. Let
 Thy scrutiny o'erlook no point of it,—
 Nor turn it over once, but many a time :—
 That flaw, speck,—yea—the shade of one,—a soil
 So slight, not one out of a thousand eyes
 Could find it out,—may not escape thee ; then
 Say if these nuptials can be shunn'd with honour !

CLIFFORD.

They can.

JULIA.

Then take me, Clifford ! (*They embrace.*)

WALTER (*entering*).

Ha ! What's this ?
 Ha ! treason ! What ! my baronet that was,
 My secretary now ? Your servant, Sir !
 Is't thus you do the pleasure of your lord,—
 That for your service, feeds you, clothes you, pays you !
 Or tak'st thou but the name of his dependent ?
 What's here ?—a letter. Fifty crowns to one
 A forgery ! I'm wrong. It is his hand.
 This proves thee double traitor !

CLIFFORD.

Traitor !

JULIA.

Nay,
 Control thy wrath, good Master Walter ! Do,—
 And I'll persuade him to go hence—(*MASTER WALTER retires up
 the stage.*) I see
 For me thou bearest this, and thank thee, Clifford !
 As thou hast truly shown thy heart to me,
 So truly I to thee have open'd mine !
 Time flies ! To-morrow ! If thy love can find
 A way, such as thou said'st, for my enlargement,
 By any means thou canst, apprise me of it,—
 And soon as shown, I'll take it.

WALTER.

Is he gone ?

JULIA.

He is this moment. If thou covet'st me,
 Win me, and wear me ! May I trust thee ? Oh !
 If that's thy soul, that's looking through thine eye,
 Thou lov'st me, and I may !—I sicken, lest
 I never see thee more !

CLIFFORD.

As life is mine,
 The ring that on thy wedding finger goes
 No hand but mine shall place there !

WALTER.

Lingers he ?

JULIA.

For my sake, now away ! And yet a word.
 By all thy hopes most dear, be true to me !
 Go now !—yet stay ! Clifford, while you are here,
 I'm like a bark distress'd and compassless,
 That by a beacon steers ; when you're away,
 That bark alone, and tossing miles at sea !
 Now go ! Farewell ! My compass—beacon—land !
 When shall my eyes be bless'd with thee again !

CLIFFORD.

Farewell !

[*Exit.*

JULIA.

Art gone ! All's chance—all's care—all's darkness !
 (*Is led off by MASTER WALTER.*)

END OF FOURTH ACT.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—AN APARTMENT IN THE EARL OF
ROCHDALE'S.*Enter HELEN and FATHOM.*

FATHOM.

THE long and the short of it is this—if she marries this Lord, she'll
 break her heart ! I wish you could see her, madam. Poor lady !

HELEN.

How looks she, prithee ?

FATHOM.

Marry, for all the world like a dripping wet cambric handkerchief !
 She has no colour nor strength in her ; and does nothing but weep—
 poor lady !

HELEN.

Tell me again what said she to thee ?

FATHOM.

She offered me all she was mistress of to take the letter to Master
 Clifford. She drew her purse from her pocket—the ring from her
 finger—she took her very ear-rings out of her ears—but I was for-
 bidden, and refused. And now I'm sorry for it ! Poor lady !

HELEN.

Thou should'st be sorry. Thou hast a hard heart, Fathom.

FATHOM.

I, madam! My heart is as soft as a woman's. You should have seen me when I came out of her chamber—poor lady!

HELEN.

Did you cry?

FATHOM.

No; but I was as near it as possible. I a hard heart! I would do any thing to serve her, poor sweet lady!

HELEN.

Will you take her letter, asks she you again?

FATHOM.

No—I am forbid.

HELEN.

Will you help Master Clifford to an interview with her!

FATHOM.

No—Master Walter would find it out.

HELEN.

Will you contrive to get me into her chamber?

FATHOM.

No—you would be sure to bring me into mischief.

HELEN.

Go to! You would do nothing to serve her. You a soft heart! You have no heart at all! You feel not for her!

FATHOM.

But I tell you I do—and good right I have to feel for her. I have been in love myself.

HELEN.

With your dinner!

FATHOM.

I would it had been! My pain would soon have been over, and at little cost. A fortune I squandered upon her!—trinkets—trimmings—treatings—what swallowed up the revenue of a whole year! Wasn't I in love? Six months I courted her, and a dozen crowns all but one did I disburse for her in that time! Wasn't I in love? An hostler—a tapster—and a constable, courted her at the same time, and I offered to cudgel the whole three of them for her! Wasn't I in love?

HELEN.

You are a valiant man, Fathom.

FATHOM.

Am not I? Walks not the earth the man I am afraid of.

HELEN.

Fear you not Master Walter?

FATHOM.

No.

HELEN.

You do.

FATHOM.

I don't.

HELEN.

I'll prove it to you. You see him breaking your young mistress's heart, and have not the manhood to stand by her.

FATHOM.

What could I do for her ?

HELEN.

Let her out of prison. It were the act of a man.

FATHOM.

That man am I!

HELEN.

Well said, brave Fathom!

FATHOM.

But my place!—

HELEN.

I'll provide thee with a better one.

FATHOM.

'Tis a capital place! So little to do, and so much to get for't. Six pounds in the year; two suits of livery; shoes and stockings, and a famous larder. He'd be a bold man that would put such a place in jeopardy. My place, Madam, my place!

HELEN.

I tell thee I'll provide thee with a better place. Thou shalt have less to do, and more to get. Now, Fathom, hast thou courage to stand by thy mistress?

FATHOM.

I have!

HELEN.

That's right.

FATHOM.

I'll let my lady out.

Enter MASTER WALTER unperceived.

HELEN.

That's right. When, Fathom?

FATHOM.

To-night.

HELEN.

She is to be married to-night.

FATHOM.

This evening then. Master Walter is now in the library, the key is on the outside, and I'll lock him in.

HELEN.

Excellent! You'll do it?

FATHOM.

Rely upon it. How he'll stare when he finds himself a prisoner, and my young lady at liberty.

HELEN.

Most excellent! You'll be sure to do it?

FATHOM.

Depend upon me! When Fathom undertakes a thing, he defies fire and water—

WALTER (*coming forward.*)

Fathom!

- Sir !
FATHOM.
- Assemble straight the servants.
WALTER.
- Yes, Sir !
FATHOM.
- Mind,
And have them in the hall when I come down.
WALTER.
- Yes, Sir !
FATHOM.
- And see you do not stir a step,
But where I order you.
WALTER.
- Not an inch, Sir !
FATHOM.
- See that you don't—away ! So, my fair mistress, [Exit FATHOM.
What's this you have been plotting ? An escape
For mistress Julia ?
WALTER.
- I avow it.
HELEN.
- Do you ?
WALTER.
- Yes ; and moreover to your face I tell you,
Most hardly do you use her.
HELEN.
- Verily !
WALTER.
- I wonder where's her spirit ! Had she mine
She would not take't so easily. Do you mean
To force this marriage on her ?
HELEN.
- With your leave.
WALTER.
- You laugh.
HELEN.
- Without it then. I don't laugh now.
WALTER.
- If I were she, I'd find a way to escape.
HELEN.
- What would you do ?
WALTER.
- I'd leap out of the window !
HELEN.
- Your window should be barr'd.
WALTER.
- I'd cheat you still !
HELEN.
- I'd hang myself ere I'd be forced to marry !

WALTER.

Well said! you shall be married, then, to-night.

HELEN.

Married to-night!

WALTER.

As sure as I have said it.

HELEN.

Two words to that. Pray who's to be my bridegroom?

WALTER.

A daughter's husband is her father's choice.

HELEN.

My father's daughter ne'er shall wed such husband!

WALTER.

Indeed!

HELEN.

I'll pick a husband for myself.

WALTER.

Indeed!

HELEN.

Indeed, Sir; and indeed again!

WALTER.

Go dress you for the marriage ceremony.

HELEN.

But, Master Walter, what is it you mean,?

Enter MODUS.

WALTER.

Here comes your cousin;—he shall be your bridesman!
The thought's a sudden one,—that will excuse
Defect in your appointments. A plain dress,—
So 'tis of white,—will do.

HELEN.

I'll dress in black.

I'll quit the castle.

WALTER.

That you shall not do.

Its doors are guarded by my lord's domestics,
Its avenues—its grounds: what you must do,
Do with a good grace. In an hour, or less,
Your father will be here. Make up your mind
To take with thankfulness the man he gives you.
Now, (*aside*) if they find not out how beat their hearts,
I have no skill, not I, in feeling pulses.

[*Exit.*

HELEN.

Why, cousin Modus! What! will you stand by
And see me forced to marry? Cousin Modus!
Have you not got a tongue? Have you not eyes?
Do you not see I'm very—very ill,
And not a chair in all the corridor?

MODUS.

I'll find one in the study.

HELEN.

Hang the study !

MODUS.

My room's at hand. I'll fetch one thence.

HELEN.

You shan't !

I'd faint ere you came back !

MODUS.

What shall I do ?

HELEN.

Why don't you offer to support me ? Well ?

Give me your arm—be quick ! (MODUS offers his arm.)

Is that the way

To help a lady when she's like to faint ?

I'll drop unless you catch me ! (MODUS supports her.)

That will do ;

I'm better now—(MODUS offers to leave her) don't leave me ! Is
one well

Because one's better ? Hold my hand. Keep so.

I'll soon recover so you move not. Loves he—(aside)

Which I'll be sworn he does, he'll own it now.

Well, cousin Modus ?

MODUS.

Well, sweet cousin !

HELEN.

Well ?

You heard what Master Walter said ?

MODUS.

I did.

HELEN.

And would you have me marry ? Can't you speak ?

Say yes or no.

MODUS.

No, cousin.

HELEN.

Bravely said !

And why, my gallant cousin ?

MODUS.

Why ?

HELEN.

Ah, why ?—

Woman you know are fond of reasons—why

Would you not have me marry ? How you blush !

Is it because you do not know the reason ?

You mind me of a story of a cousin

Who once her cousin such a question asked.

He had not been to college though—for books

Had pass'd his time in reading ladies' eyes,

Which he could construe marvellously well,

Though writ in language all symbolical.

Thus stood they once together, on a day—

As we stand now—discoursed as we discourse,—
 But with this difference,—fifty gentle words
 He spoke to her, for one she spoke to him!—
 What a dear cousin! well, as I did say,
 As now I questioned thee, she questioned him.
 And what was his reply? To think of it
 Sets my heart beating—'twas so kind a one!
 So like a cousin's answer—a dear cousin!
 A gentle, honest, gallant, loving cousin!
 What did he say? A man might find it out,
 Though never read he Ovid's Art of Love.
 What did he say? He'd marry her himself!
 How stupid are you, cousin! Let me go!

MODUS.

You are not well yet?

HELEN.

Yes.

MODUS.

I'm sure you're not?

HELEN.

I'm sure I am.

MODUS.

Nay, let me hold you, cousin!
 I like it.

HELEN.

Do you? I would wager you
 You could not tell me why you like it. Well?
 You see how true I know you! How you stare!
 What see you in my face to wonder at?

MODUS.

A pair of eyes!

HELEN.

At last he'll find his tongue—(*aside.*)
 And saw you ne'er a pair of eyes before?

MODUS.

Not such a pair.

HELEN.

And why?

MODUS.

They are so bright!
 You have a Grecian nose.

HELEN.

Indeed.

MODUS.

Indeed!

HELEN.

What kind of mouth have I?

MODUS.

A handsome one.
 I never saw so sweet a pair of lips!
 I ne'er saw lips at all till now, dear cousin!

HELEN.

Cousin, I'm well,—you need not hold me now.
Do you not hear? I tell you I am well!
I need your arm no longer—take't away!
So tight it locks me, 'tis with pain I breathe!
Let me go, cousin! Wherefore do you hold
Your face so close to mine? What do you mean?

MODUS.

You've questioned me, and now I'll question you.

HELEN.

What would you learn?

MODUS.

The use of lips.

HELEN.

To speak.

MODUS.

Nought else?

HELEN.

How bold my modest cousin grows!
Why, other use know you?

MODUS.

I do!

HELEN.

Indeed!

You're wondrous wise! And pray what is it?

MODUS.

This! (*Attempts to kiss her.*)

HELEN.

Soft! My hand thanks you, cousin—for my lips
I keep them for a husband!—Nay, stand off!
I'll not be held in manacles again!
Why do you follow me?

MODUS.

I love you cousin!

HELEN.

O cousin, say you so! That's passing strange!
Falls out most crossly—is a dire mishap—
A thing to sigh for, weep for, languish for,
And die for!

MODUS.

Die for!

HELEN.

Yes, with laughter, cousin!
For, cousin, I love you!

MODUS.

And you'll be mine?

HELEN.

I will.

MODUS.

Your hand upon it.

HELEN.

Hand and heart.

Hie to thy dressing-room, and I'll to mine—

Attire thee for the altar—so will I.

Whoe'er may claim me, thou'rt the man shall have me.

Away! Despatch! But hark you, ere you go,

Ne'er brag of reading Ovid's Art of Love!

MODUS.

And cousin! stop—one little word with you!

*(She returns, he snatches a kiss.)**[Exeunt severally.]*

SCENE II.—JULIA'S CHAMBER.

Enter JULIA.

JULIA.

No word from him, and evening now set in!

He cannot play me false! His messenger

Is dogged—or letter intercepted. I'm

Beset with spies!—No rescue!—No escape!—

The hour at hand that brings my bridegroom home!

No relative to aid me! friend to counsel me!

(A knock at the door.)

Come in.

Enter two FEMALE ATTENDANTS.

Your will?

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Your toilet waits, my lady;

'Tis time you dress.

JULIA.

'Tis time I die! *(A peal of bells.)* What's that?

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Your wedding bells, my lady.

JULIA.

Merrily

They ring my knell! *(SECOND ATTENDANT presents an open case.)*

And pray you what are these?

SECOND ATTENDANT.

Your wedding jewels.

JULIA.

Set them by.

SECOND ATTENDANT.

Indeed

Was ne'er a braver set! A necklace, brooch,

And ear-rings all of brilliants, with a hoop

To guard your wedding ring.

JULIA.

'Twould need a guard
That lacks a heart to keep it!

SECOND ATTENDANT.

Here's a heart
Suspended from the necklace—one huge diamond
Imbedded in a host of smaller ones!
Oh! how it sparkles!

JULIA.

Show it me! Bright heart,
Thy lustre, should I wear thee, will be false,—
For thou the emblem art of love and truth,—
From her that wears thee unto him that gives thee.
Back to thy case! Better thou ne'er shouldst leave it—
Better thy gems a thousand fathoms deep
In their native mine again, than grace my neck,
And lend thy fair face to palm off a lie!

FIRST ATTENDANT.

Wilt please you dress?

JULIA.

Ah! in infected clothes
New from a pest-house! Leave me! If I dress,
I dress alone! O! for a friend! Time gallops!

[*Exeunt* ATTENDANTS.]

He that should guard me is mine enemy!
Constrains me to abide the fatal die,
My rashness, not my reason cast! He comes,
That will exact the forfeit! Must I pay it?—
E'en at the cost of utter bankruptcy!
What's to be done? Pronounce the vow that parts
My body from my soul! To what it loathes
Links that, while this is link'd to what it loves!
Condemned to such perdition! What's to be done?
Stand at the altar in an hour from this!
An hour thence seated at his board—a wife!
Thence!—frenzy's in the thought! What's to be done?

Enter MASTER WALTER.

WALTER.

What! run the waves so high? Not ready yet!
Your lord will soon be here! The guests collect.

JULIA.

Show me some way to 'scape these nuptials! Do it!
Some opening for avoidance or escape,—
Or to thy charge I'll lay a broken heart!
It may be, broken vows, and blasted honour!
Or else a mind distraught!

WALTER.

What's this?

JULIA.

The strait

I'm fallen into my patience cannot bear!
 It frights my reason—warps my sense of virtue!
 Religion! changes me into a thing,
 I look at with abhorring!

WALTER.

Listen to me.

JULIA.

Listen to me, and heed me! If this contract
 Thou hold'st me to—abide thou the result!
 Answer to heaven for what I suffer!—act!
 Prepare thyself for such calamity
 To fall on me, and those whose evil stars
 Have link'd them with me, as no past mishap,
 However rare, and marvellously sad,
 Can parallel! Lay thy account to live
 A smileless life, die an unpitied death—
 Abhorr'd, abandon'd of thy kind,—as one
 Who had the guarding of a young maid's peace,—
 Look'd on and saw her rashly peril it;—
 And when she saw her danger, and confess'd
 Her fault, compell'd her to complete her ruin!

WALTER.

Hast done!

JULIA.

Another moment, and I have.
 Be warn'd! Beware how you abandon me
 To myself! I'm young, rash, inexperience'd! tempted
 By most insufferable misery!
 Bold, desperate, and reckless! Thou hast age,
 Experience, wisdom, and collectedness,—
 Power, freedom,—every thing that I have not,
 Yet want, as none e'er wanted! Thou canst save me,
 Thou ought'st! thou must! I tell thee at his feet
 I'll fall a corse—ere mount his bridal bed!
 So choose betwixt my rescue and my grave;—
 And quickly too! The hour of sacrifice
 Is near! Anon the immolating priest
 Will summon me! Devise some speedy means
 To cheat the altar of its victim. Do it!
 Nor leave the task to me!

WALTER.

Hast done?

JULIA.

I have.

WALTER.

Then list to me—and silently, if not
 With patience.—(*Brings chairs for himself and her.*)
 How I watch'd thee from thy childhood,
 I'll not recall to thee. Thy father's wisdom—
 Whose humble instrument I was—directed

Your nonage should be pass'd in privacy,
 From your apt mind that far outstripp'd your years,
 Fearing the taint of an infected world;—
 For, in the rich grounds, weeds once taking root,
 Grow strong as flowers. He might be right or wrong !
 I thought him right; and therefore did his bidding.
 Most certainly he lov'd you—so did I;
 Ay! well as I had been myself your father !

(His hand is resting upon his knee, JULIA attempts to take it—he withdraws it—looks at her—she hangs her head.)

Well; you may take my hand! I need not say
 How fast you grew in knowledge, and in goodness,—
 That hope could scarce enjoy its golden dreams
 So soon fulfilment realized them all!
 Enough. You came to womanhood. Your heart,
 Pure as the leaf of the consummate bud,
 That's new unfolded by the smiling sun,
 And ne'er knew blight nor canker !

(JULIA attempts to place her other hand on his shoulder—he leans from her—looks at her—she hangs her head again.)

Put it there!
 Where left I off? I know! When a good woman
 Is fitly mated, she grows doubly good,
 How good soe'er before! I found the man
 I thought a match for thee; and, soon as found
 Proposed him to thee. 'Twas your father's will,
 Occasion offering, you should be married
 Soon as you reach'd to womanhood.—You lik'd
 My choice—accepted him.—We came to town;
 Where, by important matter summon'd thence,
 I left you an affianced bride !

JULIA.

You did !
 You did !

(Leans her head upon her hand, and weeps.)

WALTER.

Nay, check thy tears! Let judgment now,
 Not passion, be awake. On my return,
 I found thee—what? I'll not describe the thing
 I found thee then! I'll not describe my pangs
 To see thee such a thing! The engineer
 Who lays the last stone of his sea-built tower,
 It cost him years and years of toil to raise,—
 And, smiling at it, tells the winds and waves
 To roar and whistle now—but, in a night,
 Beholds the tempest sporting in its place—
 May look aghast, as I did !

JULIA *(falling on her knees.)*

Pardon me !
 Forgive me! pity me !

WALTER.

Resume thy seat. (*Raises her.*)
I pity thee; perhaps not thee alone
It fits to sue for pardon.

JULIA.

Me alone!
None other!

WALTER.

But to vindicate myself,
I name thy lover's stern desertion of thee.
What wast thou then with wounded pride? A thing
To leap into a torrent! throw itself
From a precipice! rush into a fire! I saw
Thy madness—knew to thwart it were to chafe it—
And humour'd it to take that course, I thought,
Adopted, least 'twould rue!

JULIA.

'Twas wisely done.

WALTER.

At least 'twas for the best!

JULIA.

To blame thee for it,
Was adding shame to shame! But, Master Walter!
These nuptials!—must they needs go on?
SERVANT (*entering.*)

More guests
Arrive.

WALTER.

[*Exit* SERVANT.]

Attend to them.

JULIA.

Dear Master Walter!
Is there no way to escape these nuptials?

WALTER.

Know'st not
What with these nuptials comes? Hast thou forgot?

JULIA.

What?

WALTER.

Nothing!—I did tell thee of a thing.

JULIA.

What was it?

WALTER.

To forget it was a fault!
Look back and think.

JULIA.

I can't remember it.

WALTER.

Fathers, make straws your children! Nature's nothing!
Blood nothing! Once in other veins it runs,
It no more yearneth for the parent flood,

Than doth the stream that from the source disparts.
Talk not of love instinctive—what you call so
Is but the brat of custom! Your own flesh
By habit cleaves to you—without,
Hath no adhesion! (*Aside.*) So; you have forgot
You have a father, and are here to meet him!

JULIA.

I'll not deny it.

WALTER.

You should blush for't.

JULIA.

No!

No! no: hear, Master Walter! what's a father
That you've not been to me? Nay, turn not from me,
For at the name a holy awe I own,
That now almost inclines my knee to earth!
But thou to me, except a father's name,
Hast all the father been: the care—the love—
The guidance—the protection of a father.
Canst wonder, then, if like thy child I feel,—
And feeling so, that father's claim forget
Whom ne'er I knew, save by the name of one?
Oh turn to me, and do not chide me! or
If thou wilt chide, chide on! but turn to me!

WALTER (*struggling with emotion*).

My Julia! (*Embraces her*).

JULIA.

Now, dear Master Walter, hear me!
Is there no way to 'scape these nuptials?

WALTER.

Julia,

A promise made admits not of release,
Save by consent or forfeiture of those
Who hold it—so it should be pondered well
Before we let it go.—Ere man should say
I broke the word I had the power to keep,
I'd lose the life I had the power to part with!
Remember, Julia, thou and I to-day
Must to thy father of thy training render
A strict account. While honour's left to us,
We have something—nothing, having all but that.
Now for thy last act of obedience, Julia!
Present thyself before thy bridegroom! (*She assents.*)
Good!

My Julia's now herself! Show him thy heart,
And to his honour leave't to set thee free
Or hold thee bound. Thy father will be by! [*Exeunt severally.*]

SCENE III.—THE BANQUETING ROOM.

Enter MASTER WALTER *and* MASTER HEARTWELL.

HEARTWELL.

Thanks, Master Walter! Ne'er was child more bent
To do her father's will, you'll own, than mine:
Yet never one more froward.

WALTER.

All runs fair—
Fair may all end! To-day you'll learn the cause
That took me out of town. But soft awhile,—
Here comes the bridegroom, with his friends, and here
The all-obedient bride.

[*Enter on one hand* JULIA, *and on the other hand* LORD
ROCHDALE *with* LORD TINSEL, *and friends—after-*
wards CLIFFORD.

ROCHDALE.

Is she not fair?

TINSEL.

She'll do. Your servant, lady! Master Walter,
We're glad to see you. Sirs, you're welcome all!
What wait they for? Are we to wed or not?
We're ready—why don't they present the bride?
I hope they know she is to wed an earl.

ROCHDALE.

Should I speak first?

TINSEL.

Not for your coronet!
I, as your friend, may make the first advance.
We've come here to be married. Where's the bride?

WALTER.

There stands she, lord; if 'tis her will to wed,
His lordship's free to take her.

TINSEL.

Not a step!
I, as your friend, may lead her to your lordship.
Fair lady, by your leave.

JULIA.

No! not to you.

TINSEL.

I ask your hand to give it to his lordship.

JULIA.

Nor to his lordship—save he will accept
My hand without my heart! but I'll present
My knee to him, and, by his lofty rank,
Implore him now to do a lofty deed
Will lift its stately head above his rank,—

Assert him nobler yet in worth than name,—
 And, in the place of an unwilling bride,
 Unto a willing debtor make him lord,—
 Whose thanks shall be his vassals, night and day
 That still shall wait upon him !

TINSEL.

What means this ?

JULIA.

What is't behoves a wife to bring her lord ?

WALTER.

A whole heart, and a true one.

JULIA.

I have none !
 Not half a heart—the fraction of a heart !
 Am I a woman it befits to wed ?

WALTER.

Why, where's thy heart ?

JULIA.

Gone—out of my keeping !
 Lost—past recovery : right and title to it—
 And all given up ! and he that's owner on't,
 So fit to wear it, were it fifty hearts,
 I'd give it to him all !

WALTER.

Thou dost not mean
 His lordship's secretary ?

JULIA.

Yes. Away
 Disguises ! in that secretary know
 The master of the heart, of which, the poor,
 Unvalued, empty casket, at your feet,—
 Its jewel gone,—I now despairing throw ! (*Kneels.*)
 Of his lord's bride he's lord ! lord paramount !
 To whom her virgin homage first she paid,—
 'Gainst whom rebell'd in frowardness alone,
 Nor knew herself how loyal to him, till
 Another claim'd her duty—then awoke
 To sense of all she ow'd him—all his worth—
 And all her undeservings !

TINSEL.

Lady, we came not here to treat of hearts,—
 But marriage ; which, so please you, is with us
 A simple joining, by the priest, of hands.
 A ring's put on ; a prayer or two is said ;
 You're man and wife,—and nothing more ! For hearts,
 We oft'ner do without, than with them, lady !

CLIFFORD.

So does not wed this lady !

TINSEL.

Who are you ?

CLIFFORD.

I'm secretary to the Earl of Rochdale.

TINSEL.

My lord!

ROCHDALE.

I know him not—

TINSEL.

I know him now—

Your lordship's rival! Once Sir Thomas Clifford.

CLIFFORD.

Yes, and the bridegroom of that lady then,
Then lov'd her—loves her still!

JULIA.

Was lov'd by her—
Though then she knew it not!—is lov'd by her,
As now she knows, and all the world may know!

TINSEL.

We can't be laugh'd at. We are here to wed,
And shall fulfil our contract.

JULIA.

Clifford!

CLIFFORD.

Julia!

You will not give your hand? (*A pause—JULIA seems utterly lost.*)

WALTER.

You have forgot
Again. You have a father!

JULIA.

Bring him now,—
To see thy Julia justify thy training,
And lay her life down to redeem her word!

WALTER.

And so redeems her all! Is it your will,
My lord, these nuptials should go on?

ROCHDALE.

It is.

WALTER.

Then is it mine they stop!

TINSEL.

I told your lordship
You should not keep a Hunchback for your agent.

WALTER.

Thought like my father, my good lord, who said
He would not have a Hunchback for his son,—
So do I pardon you the savage slight!
My lord, that I am not as straight as you,
Was blemish neither of my thought nor will,
My head nor heart. It was no act of mine,—
Yet did it curdle nature's kindly milk
E'en where 'tis richest—in a parent's breast—
To cast me out to heartless fosterage,

Not heartless always, as it prov'd—and give
My portion to another ! the same blood—
But I'll be sworn, in vein, my lord, and soul—
Although his trunk did swerve no more than yours—
Not half so straight as I.

TINSEL.

Upon my life
You've got a modest agent, Rochdale ! Now
He'll prove himself descended—mark my words—
From some small gentleman !

WALTER.

And so you thought,
Where nature played the churl, it would be fit
That fortune played it too. You would have had
My lord absolve me of my agency !
Fair lord, the flaw did cost me fifty times—
A hundred times my agency :—but all's
Recovered. Look, my lord, a testament
To make a pension of his lordship's rent roll !
It is my father's, and was left by him,
In case his heir should die without a son,
Then to be opened. Heaven did send a son.
To bless the heir. Heaven took its gift away.
He died—His father died. And Master Walter—
The unsightly agent of his lordship there—
The Hunchback whom your lordship would have stripped
Of his agency,—is now the Earl of Rochdale !

TINSEL.

We've made a small mistake here. Never mind,
'Tis nothing in a lord.

JULIA.

The Earl of Rochdale !

WALTER.

And what of that ? Thou know'st not half my greatness !
A prouder title, Julia, have I yet.
Sooner than part with which I'd give that up,
And be again plain Master Walter. What !
Dost thou not apprehend me ? Yes, thou dost !
Command thyself—don't gasp ! My pupil—daughter !
Come to thy father's heart !

(JULIA rushes into his arms.)

Enter FATHOM.

FATHOM.

Thievery ! Elopement—escape—arrest !

WALTER.

What's the matter ?

FATHOM.

Mistress Helen is running away with Master Modus—Master
Modus is running away with Mistress Helen—but we have caught

them, secured them, and here they come, to receive the reward of their merits.

Enter HELEN and MODUS, followed by Serrants.

HELEN.

I'll ne'er wed man, if not my cousin Modus.

MODUS.

Nor woman I, save cousin Helen's she.

WALTER (*to MASTER HEARTWELL*).

A daughter, have you, and a nephew too,
Without their match in duty! Let them marry.
For you, Sir, who to-day have lost an earldom,
Yet would have shared that earldom with my child—
My only one—content yourself with prospect
Of the succession—it must fall to you.
And fit yourself to grace it. Ape not those
Who rank by pride. The man of simplest bearing
Is yet a lord, when he's a lord indeed!

TINSEL.

The paradox is obsolete. Ne'er heed!
Learn from his book, and practise out of mine!

WALTER.

Sir Thomas Clifford, take my daughter's hand!—
If now you know the master of her heart!
Give it, my Julia! You suspect, I see,
And rightly, there has been some masking here.
Content thee, daughter, thou shalt know anon,
How jealousy of my mis-shapen back
Made me mistrustful of a child's affections—
Who doubted e'en a wife's—so that I dropped
The title of thy father, lest thy duty
Should pay the debt thy love could solve alone.
All this and more, that to thy friends and thee
Pertains, at fitting time thou shalt be told.
But now thy nuptials wait—the happy close
Of thy hard trial—wholesome, though severe!
The world won't cheat thee now—thy heart is proved;—
Thou know'st thy peace by finding out its bane,
And ne'er wilt act from reckless impulse more!

THE END.

LONDON :
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS,
WHITEFRIARS.

W O M A N ' S W I T

OR,

LOVE'S DISGUISES.

A Play,

IN FIVE ACTS.



BY

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES,

AUTHOR OF "VIRGINIUS," "THE HUNCHBACK," &c.

LONDON:

EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.

MDCCCXXXVIII.

LONDON :
BRADBURY AND EVANS, PRINTERS TO THE QUEEN,
WHITEFRIARS.

TO

SAMUEL ROGERS.

This Play

IS

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

BY

JAMES SHERIDAN KNOWLES.

A D V E R T I S E M E N T.

ANXIOUS to promote, to the utmost of my humble ability, an honourable and chivalrous speculation, this play was promised to my friend, Mr. Macready, six months ago, and ought to have been ready last February. Repeated attacks of severe indisposition prevented me from completing it until my return to town, about the middle of April. If it is favourably received,—to the indefatigable and masterly superintendence, to the unstinting liberality, of the present enthusiastic and enterprising Lessee of the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, it will be indebted for no inconsiderable portion of its success.

London, May 21st, 1838.

CHARACTERS.

LORD ATHUNREE	MR. WARDE.
SIR VALENTINE DE GREY	MR. ANDERSON.
SIR WILLIAM SUTTON	MR. BARTLEY.
WALSINGHAM	MR. MACREADY.
BRADFORD	MR. WALDRON.
FELTON	MR. PRITCHARD.
MONSIEUR DE L'EPEE	MR. TILBURY.
CLEVER	MR. HARLEY.
LEWSON	MR. DIDDEAR.
SIR WILLIAM SUTTON'S SERVANT	MR. HOLMES.
SIR VALENTINE'S SERVANT	MR. COLLET.
OFFICER	MR. C. J. SMITH.
EUSTACE	MISS TAYLOR.
HERO	MISS H. FAUCIT.
EMILY	MRS. SERLE.

W O M A N ' S W I T ;

OR,

Lobe's Disguises.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Sir William Sutton's House.—An Ante-room leading to a Ball-room.—Music as of a Ball.—Dancers seen in the further Apartment.—Visitors passing in and out.

Enter from the Ball-room, WALSINGHAM and BRADFORD.

WALSINGHAM.

FAIR revels these Sir William Sutton holds,
And all in honour of the city maid !
Sure the whole town is here, such swarms pass in
And out. Is it a match, as they report,
Betwixt the maid and brave Sir Valentine ?

BRADFORD.

In prospect, Sir ; but yet I question much,
If in a year hence, nearer than to-day.
She of the spirit of conquest is possess'd
Incontinently : victory but serves

To whet the lust of triumph. Strange so long
 Lord Athunree did occupy her : but
 His station ceased, soon as Sir Valentine
 Aspir'd to fill his place. A grief it is,
 A maid with treasure past compare like her's
 Of gorgeous beauty, with a mine of wealth,
 Should use her riches with such huswifry,
 As makes one pity her possession of them !

WALSINGHAM.

Lo you, she dances, and, for partner, takes
 Lord Athunree, and not Sir Valentine.
 A novel measure that ! know you its name ?

BRADFORD.

No—ay !—a liberal measure !—See !—his hand
 Doth hold possession of her waist ; while her's,
 Nothing repelling, on his shoulder rests,
 Permitting neighbourhood so close, embrace
 Were scarce in privilege a jot behind.

WALSINGHAM.

You know Lord Athunree ?—his character ?
 The limits of my acquaintance.

BRADFORD.

No, Sir.

WALSINGHAM.

Sir,
 He is a libertine. He hath been much
 Abroad. That dance, I will be bound, is ware
 Of his importing. Yes ; a libertine !
 A man of pleasure—in the animal
 Ignoble sense of the term—that owns no curb
 Of honour, generosity, or ruth ;

Nor hath a single grace, except the nerve—
 A contradiction which would make one question
 That valour is of itself a thing to boast of—
 To vouch the wrong he does, and stand by it!

BRADFORD.

You say this feelingly.

WALSINGHAM.

Because I feel it.

I had a friend, whose heart could scarce lodge weal
 Or woe, without the privity of mine—
 A friend of quick affections—and a villain
 Compassed the ruin of the maid he loved.
 That villain was the lord, who dances there.
 They fought—thro' odds in skill, the honest arm
 Was mastered by the foul; but vengeance, tho'
 'Tis baffled, is not lost! Good morning, for
 More than an hour or twain, 'tis past the turn
 Of night.—Free thanks for your free converse with
 A stranger.

BRADFORD.

Sir, the like I render you :
 But will you not delay some moments more?
 In spirit, yet the revels are but young!

WALSINGHAM.

Sir, I am pall'd with them—and were I not,
 That lord approaches, and the sight of him
 Would put out keenest zest of joyance.

BRADFORD.

Have with you, then; far as our road is one,
 We'll go together.

WALSINGHAM.

Sir, right willingly !

[*They go out.*]*Enter* LORD ATHUNREE *and* FELTON.

LORD ATHUNREE.

'Tis not for him, by sheer effrontery,
 For two years I have held the foremost place
 'Mongst swarms of lovers close besieging her !
 Made one and all to stand aloof, whene'er
 I thought they press'd too near !

FELTON.

I have marvell'd oft
 At your success.

LORD ATHUNREE.

Of blood-letting, you know,
 In the high mode, I have as little fear,
 As need of fear ; and would they come to that,
 I soon convinced them, that I knew their art
 Better than they did.

FELTON.

To say the truth, the foil
 Has stood you much in stead, when there was need
 Of weapon of graver practice.—Found you ever
 Your equal in the fence ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

Ay ; and my master !
 And therein do I tax my lucky stars,
 That watch not o'er me now. He is here in the house,
 That gentleman from travel late arrived,
 Who, with the gloss of the fair countries which
 He has been seeing, shines, and quite puts out
 All light of homely worth.

FELTON.

Sir Valentine ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

'The same ;

That knight of France, tho' son of England. Ay,

And would be captain too, to Venus, Sir !

Would take the fortress, all who'd carry which,

I at impracticable distance still

Have kept—yet come no nearer than I was

To winning it, when first set down before it.

FELTON.

Fear'st thou surrender then to him ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

Humph ! Fear ?

That "fear" 's an ugly word ! "Do I fear ?" He is quick !

His point and eye do go together ! Scarce

You are mark'd, you are hit ! his sword is part of him,

Grows to his hand, Sir, as his hand to his wrist ;

The very moment that your weapons touch,

He is here, and there, and in !—his lounge, a shot

You see not till 'tis home ! We quarrell'd once,

And twice I felt him, ere a man could say

That he was well *en garde*—but touches, yet

Forerunners sure of heavier payment—so

I gave the battle up !—Yes, I do fear—

Save I have hit him, as I think I have,

Where useless lounge or parry !

FELTON.

Hit him ! How ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

I' the brain and heart, Sir, without damage of

'The skin ! Thro' the eyes, Sir, that take hit and hit

And ne'er the worse, howe'er the practice tells
 Within! He is a man of sentiment!
 Sentiment, mark you! that is, flesh and blood
 I' the summer cool as spring—or water, Sir,
 At the boiling point without a bubble—or wood
 Without ignition in the heart of fire!
 An ample span of forehead!—Mark!—a full
 And liquid eye—free nostrils—crimson lips,
 Cushioning one another without stint
 Of the velvet—and a chin could show a copse
 Of beard—a man, Sir, with all these, and yet
 With wishes innocent as thoughts of babes!
 A lie, Sir, on the face of it!—yet such
 He passes for unto himself—believes
 Indeed he is, and doth of others judge
 But thro' the colour of this self-delusion—
 Particularly women. He would have them
 Earth to himself—to all else, things of Heaven!
 Impassive to impression, as the air
 Which man ne'er yet gave form or colour to!

FELTON.

Well?

LORD ATHUNREE.

I did dance with her just now.

FELTON.

Fair Hero?

LORD ATHUNREE.

Yes; I did dance with her a free
 And liberal dance—the dance of contact, else
 Forbid—abandoning to the free hand
 The sacred waist! while face to face, till breath
 Doth kiss with breath, and eye embraceth eye.

Your transed coil relaxing, straight'ning, round
And round in wavy measure, you entwine
Circle with circle, till the swimming brain
And panting heart in swoony lapse give o'er!

FELTON.

I know ; that foreign dance thou didst bring home.

LORD ATHUNREE.

The very same ; I taught it her, and first
Did dance with her to-night.

FELTON.

I had admir'd
To see you.

LORD ATHUNREE.

Had you not, I had admir'd
The card-room kept you. Give you joy—you won !
But to the dance. The evening half was out
And still he held her ear.

FELTON.

Sir Valentine?

LORD ATHUNREE.

Who else ? who else that seat pre-eminent
By her fair side had held in spite of me.
I watch'd for my occasion, and it came ;
Some friend did crave a moment's audience ; ere
'Twas done, her waist was in my custody ;
Her white arm hanging from my shoulder, where
Her hand did freely couch. " Your game goes well ! "
I whisper'd her ; " Play boldly, and 'tis your's :
The measure this to set the outline off !
Give sway to thy rich figure ! Abandon thee
To the spirit of the dance ! Let it possess thee !

Float thee as air were footing for thee! stud
 Thy cheeks with smiles of fire, and give thine eye
 The lightning's dazzling play! fix them on mine,
 That each do feed the other's, like to tongues
 With converse waking converse!"

FELTON.

Well?—I see
 Thy drift!

LORD ATHUNREE.

Thou should'st have seen the issue on't—
 While, like a pupil at a task he loves,
 Whose aptitude with eager will outstrips
 His master's bidding, she was twenty times
 The thing I wished her! How she rose and sank
 With springy instep, while her yielding waist—
 Well as her waving neck, her beauteous head—
 Did show her fair and falling shoulders off!
 A world she look'd and moved of passionate
 Quick sense—of loveliness and joyousness—
 And I, be sure, did show its reigning lord!
 Nor with the measure did dominion cease;
 But when her drooping lids, relaxed steps,
 Disparted lips, and colour vanishing,
 Gave note she must give o'er—her languid form,
 Close girdled by my arm, her hand in mine,
 Her cheek for pillow on my shoulder laid,
 I led her to a couch, where courtesy
 Of course admitted tendance!

FELTON.

What of him?

LORD ATHUNREE.

He is mad! When he did turn, and note us first,

He looked as one who questioned his own eyes ;
Then stood awhile, no doubt admiring how
Step did keep time with step, and how we mov'd
In closest neighbourhood, disparting but
To meet—her arm, a link ne'er letting go !
Then with a start of sudden fury went,
And cast him on a seat with folded arms,
And knitted brows scanning us, as he wish'd
His eyes could do the office of the lightning.
I car'd to mark no more—I saw the storm
I wish'd would come was on ; and knew 't would hold !

FELTON.

And does it ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

Yes ; thrice she advances made—
As women know to make, and not to seem,
Except to practis'd eyes—to draw his notice :
Dropp'd her glove near him—wish'd she had a chair,
And one at his hand—complain'd of thirst, and just
A salver brought to him with wine—and all
In vain. Right in his eyes display'd her form
In attitude of tender languishment—
And to no more account than offerings
Of gems before an idol made of stone !
But see ; we have danc'd out the night ; and day,
With fresh and flushy vigour, cometh on ;
You hear the rout breaks up. Attend him home,
Obtain his ear ; know nothing, but be sure
Of slightest opportunity he gives
For her disparagement to take advantage.
Here comes the Queen of the night, and all forlorn,
As she had lost her throne !

Enter HERO, leaning upon EMILY.

EMILY.

What miss you, Hero,
That thus you pause and turn; go on again,
And pause and turn again? Fear'st any thing
Thou hast forgot?

HERO.

No! I have danc'd too much
To-night. The night before it was the same!
No rest—all revels!—Madness, with a frame
That is any thing but iron. *[Turns to look back.*

EMILY.

There again!
I am sure there's something you do miss—What is it?

HERO.

My spirits only! Are not your's nigh wasted?
[Turns again.

LORD ATHUNREE. *[Aside to FELTON.*

She waits for him—he saw her home last night.
My life on't she must look for other squire.

EMILY.

Come.

HERO.

Are they dancing yet?

EMILY.

What do you hear,
To make you ask? You're dreaming! Saw you not
That the musicians left the room before us,
And scarce a dozen laggards did remain
Besides ourselves?

HERO.

I know not what I saw,
I am tir'd—heart-tir'd—too tir'd to move or rest—
A weariness, won't let me go or stay !

LORD ATHUNREE.

He comes—accost him—ask him of the ball.

Enter SIR VALENTINE.

FELTON.

See I Sir Valentine the last of all
The revellers ?

SIR VALENTINE.

You see him, Sir ; 'tis e'en
Sir Valentine.

FELTON.

Lik'd you the ball to-night ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Yes!—No !

FELTON.

What! Lik'd it, and dislik'd it ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Yes !

FELTON.

It was a very handsome ball.

SIR VALENTINE.

It was.

FELTON.

What was amiss, then ? Was the music bad ?

SIR VALENTINE.

The music far from bad ! Most excellent !

Incomparably good—it were in place
In a concert room,—I find no fault with the music.

FELTON.

Are you not fond of dancing, then?

SIR VALENTINE.

I am—

Innocent pastime taken innocently
In honest mood!—But there are natures, Sir,
That should eschew it—which 'tis pernicious to—
As wine, that's mirth to some, to some is madness!
I find no fault with dancing! 'Tis an act
Sets beauty off, proportion, grace; when these
Are too set off by modesty. For men,
And women more especially, of the vein
That's opposite, I'd have them lookers on—
For their own sakes first—next for the sake of those,
Who what they'd blush to do, do grieve to see
Enacted.

FELTON.

Was there any dance to-night
Offended you?

SIR VALENTINE.

N—o, Sir—I cannot say—
Perhaps there is no harm in any dance.
I am not sure—Some may give too much license—
Yet not so much, but e'en in such a case
By delicacy 'twill be carried off
Becomingly. I might perhaps object—
Yet where's the thing that can defy objection?
But this I say, Sir, and I'll stand to it,
That modesty being to woman more
'Than beauty—for, without, is beauty cheap—

That woman, who doth shew her beauty off
 Before her modesty, forgets herself,
 And merits forfeit of that high respect,
 Which noble minds would bear her !

HERO.

[To EMILY.

What lady, can you tell me, danc'd to night
 As lady should not dance ?

EMILY.

I do not know.

HERO.

[To FELTON.

Do you, Sir ?

FELTON.

No !

HERO. [To LORD ATHUNREE.

My Lord, do you ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

No, Lady.

HERO.

Perhaps some lady, whom the gentleman
 Himself did dance with, and some other noted—

SIR VALENTINE.

No lady, Madam, that did dance with me.
 Who yields to me her hand shall ne'er forget
 Herself—at least by my o'erstepping. She
 Shall find I know the honor that she does me ;
 See in the freedom of the frolic measure
 My reverence for her sex attending her ;
 And then be handed to her seat again,
 For mine own credit sake if not for her's,
 By all approv'd, as gracefully come off

In partnery of honest joyance !
 No lady, Madam, that did dance with me.

LORD ATHUNREE.

The plague repay him for the lesson he
 So freely reads me—in her presence too !

HERO.

Wilt please you name the lady gave offence ?

SIR VALENTINE.

'Twere a presumptuous act for my poor tongue.
 But if you know her, you must know her beauty,
 Wherein I ne'er met fair to liken to her,
 And that more fittingly shall name her for me.
 A noble stature, stopping there, where sex
 Would have it reach, and bid it go no farther ;
 A head of antique mould, magnificent
 As may consist with softness and with sweetness ;
 Features, advertisement of thoughts and moods,
 Wishes and fancies, such as it beseems
 To lodge with chastity and tenderness
 In sumptuous palace of rich loveliness ;
 And limbs of mould and act therewith consorting,
 Making a paragon of symmetry !—
 Gods, to such homeliness of use perverted,
 As properties, to them were homeliness,
 Should spurn to be applied to !

EMILY.

Are you ill,
 That you turn pale ?

HERO.

Ill !—What should make me ill ?
 I could be angry, were it worth my while,

At such disparagement of one, it seems
Is known to me,—but calumny is a thing
Defeats itself, and I should be despis'd
Did I pay heed to !

SIR VALENTINE.

Lady, you are right ;
It shall be calumny—it should be so !
Vouchers so fair, should never be forsworn.
Alas for him, who is incredulous,
Yet would believe them rather far than doubt them !

[SIR VALENTINE *goes out, followed by* FELTON.]

HERO.

A most strange gentleman !—an oddity !
I took him for a man of sense,—didn't you ?
A fanciful and churlish gentleman !
Looks sour because another man looks pleased !
Lord Athunreee, wilt see my carriage brought
Close to the door before I venture out,
If not to tax your gallantry too much ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

I fly to do it.

[*Goes out.*]

HERO.

Let me weep a moment
Upon your neck.—There ! I am better now.
Are my eyes red ?

EMILY.

Not much.

HERO.

I will appear
To have been laughing ! Laughter bringeth tears.
Most excellent !—you should have kept it tho'

For another time ! I have not strength to laugh !
As 'tis, I am so weak, I laugh and cry.

Re-enter ATHUNREE.

Lord Athunree, your courtesy has lost you
A most facetious story !

LORD ATHUNREE.

Tell it me.

HERO.

Tell it you ! Tell it ! I am dead already
With hearing it, and must not hear't again,
Would I go home to-night ! A little plague,
To make me laugh, and know that I should cry,
For lack of very strength.—Come, let us go !
A charming ball ! Fair night—most happy night !
I'll find a time to make *you* cry with laughing. [*To* EMILY.
A charming night—a very charming night !

[*They go out.*

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A Room in the House of MONSIEUR DE L'EPEE.

Enter, from an inner Room, WALSINGHAM and MONSIEUR DE L'EPEE.

DE L'EPEE.

Your progress answers to your practice, Sir ;
Cause have you none for discontent. Confess,
You play the foil with twice the ease you did
A month ago. Might I be credited,
Not only each new week, but even day,
Puts to the blush the former one, so fast
You catch the mystery of the fair art.

WALSINGHAM.

Yes ; but my fellow-pupil heads me still.

DE L'EPEE.

His quickness is your master.

WALSINGHAM.

Yet, 'tis strange !
With all my pains, I toil behind him still,
And he a very stripling !

DE L'ÉPÉE.

'Tis not strength
That makes the odds, but art. To turn the foil
In practis'd hand, almost a wheaten straw
Hath stamina enough. The point deceived,
An infant's arm in distance lounges home;
The art is strength, and length, and every thing.

WALSINGHAM.

To say the truth, it is a noble art,
On which agility and grace attend,
With proper manhood keeping company,
As on none other;—making lightest ease
To champion force, and, as you say, bear off
The palm from it. In every act and state—
Salute, guard, parry, feint or pass—it hath
A bearing worthy of the eyes of kings
And their high consorts, when a practis'd hand
Like your's takes up the foil.

DE L'ÉPÉE.

You flatter, Sir!

WALSINGHAM.

By my proud honour, no! But, to your pupil—
What is he?

DE L'ÉPÉE.

I know not.

WALSINGHAM.

He is very young.

DE L'ÉPÉE.

Yes; by his looks he has a teen or twain
To count;—tho' never scholar study plied

With manlier resolve and constancy.
 It often moves my wonder, that so slight
 And delicate a frame should undergo
 What to robuster mould a thousand times
 I have mark'd was weariness. Scarce lays he down
 The foil, before he takes it up again,
 Some parry, feint or lunge, unmastered yet,
 To practise;—which he does with zest so keen,
 I have thought, at times, that in his fancy's eye
 There stood before his point an enemy,
 The actor of some unatoned wrong,
 Whose heart each thrust was meant for.—A good morning!
 I am waited for.

WALSINGHAM.

Good morning to you, Sir. [DE L'ÉPÉE *goes out.*
 A noble fellow that!—a soldier who
 A mighty captain followed, for the strides
 With which he led to glory—nay, for them
 Deserted not, when fortune back'd a world,
 Marshall'd against her off-cast favourite!
 Talk you of scars?—that Frenchman bears on crown,
 Body and limb, his vouchers palpable,
 For many a thicket he has struggled thro'
 Of briery danger—wondering that he
 Came off with even life, when right and left
 His mates dropp'd thick beside him. A true man!
 His rations with his master gone—for he
 Was honour's soldier, that ne'er changes sides—
 He left his country for a foreign one,
 To teach his gallant art, and earn a home.
 I know him to be honest, generous,

High-soul'd, and modest; every way a grace
To the fine, martial nation, whence he sprang!*

EUSTACE *enters from Inner Room.*

My fellow-pupil! (*Aside*). That was a shrewd guess
The Frenchman made. Are all these pains to pay
An enemy?—then is his case my own.
Would I could gain his confidence! but still,
Oft as I try he foils me with reserve
He shows to none beside! One more attempt.—
So, fellow-pupil! You have given o'er at last.
Right well you fenc'd to-day! you are weary?

EUSTACE.

No. Good morning, Sir.

WALSINGHAM.

I' faith, you "Sir" not me:
We have been mates too long, methinks, for term
So niggard, fellow-pupil!—Walsingham
Is my name. I prithee, when thou next accost'st me,
Say, Walsingham. Is't not enough, your foil
Keeps me at distance—will not let me in—
Rebukes me, shames me—will you with your tongue
O'erbear me too? Call me not "Sir," I pray,
But Walsingham.

EUSTACE.

It were to make too free
For mere acquaintanceship.

* This is a portrait. My brothers of Glasgow know and honour the gallant man who suggested it, and will judge how far it is a faithful one. At all events it is not flattered.

WALSINGHAM.

Acquaintanceship !

You have known me for a year. Friendship hath grown
In half that time.

EUSTACE.

Friendship grows not by time.

WALSINGHAM.

In sooth 'twould seem so. Daily have we met
For good a year—nor yet have shaken hands.
Give me thy hand, and let us hence be friends !
What ! will you not ? I'faith, you should—you shall !
I'll take it spite of you—yea, tho' you frown,
And call yourself my foe, which would be hard
To make a foe, striving to make a friend.

EUSTACE (*after a pause*).

I'll shake hands with you.

WALSINGHAM.

Ha !—a hearty grasp !
But take it not away so soon again,
Nor where you give your hand, refuse your eye.
Why don't you look at me ?

EUSTACE.

Let go my hand !

WALSINGHAM.

Such haste to take away—so frank to give ?

EUSTACE.

Let go my hand !—Well, you may keep it, Sir ;
You cannot make it like its prison, nor,
When once 'tis free from't, enter it again.

WALSINGHAM.

Well—call me Walsingham, I'll let it go.
Why must I force you thus to be my friend?

EUSTACE.

Why should you? Force made never yet a friend.

WALSINGHAM.

For kindness, then! why would you hold me off?
A man repelled of Fortune! See you not,
I am not of the vein of those on whom
Her smiles she lavishes—nor do I think
With surfeit of such sweet you bought that cast
Of thoughtfulness, which, when I look upon you,
Like to my glass, shows me, methinks, myself!—
I am a man of honour and of heart.
Ah, too much heart! Come, call me Walsingham,
And then I'll let you go.

EUSTACE.

Well—Walsingham!

WALSINGHAM.

I' faith, most kindly did you sound my name;
Tongue never fell it yet more sweetly from,
Save one!—Save one!

EUSTACE.

Farewell

WALSINGHAM.

We'll walk together.

EUSTACE.

Nay.

WALSINGHAM.

Will you have it so? why have it so;

My love is not that sturdy beggar yet,
But spurning may suffice to stop its craving !
Yet ere you leave me, hear me—and then go.
Methinks our fates in something are alike ;
To prove it so, or not, I'll tell thee mine.
Give thee my confidence—make thee indeed my friend !
Now, once for all, what say you ?

EUSTACE.

Be it so.

WALSINGHAM.

Thy hand again, then!—Do we go together ?

EUSTACE.

We do!—Have with you!

WALSINGHAM.

Now we are friends for ever !

[*They go out.*

SCENE II.

A Room in HERO'S Town House.

Enter SIR WILLIAM and EMILY.

SIR WILLIAM.

At sea again ! Blown ever from the port
We'd have her harbour in, by her wild fancies,
And far from land as ever ! I did hope
This suitor had been anchorage had held her.

EMILY.

And so did I ; she'll ne'er be held by suitor,

Long as there bows another—save it be
By a miracle. I say it, tho' I love her.

SIR WILLIAM.

And yet that lord hath held her.

EMILY.

So he hath,
By dint of mere audacity—some art
He owns makes other suitors quail, and she,
For vanity, hath still affected him,
As proud to have a vassal in a man
To whom his fellows bow.

SIR WILLIAM.

I am glad so slight
His power. I know him for a profligate,
With broken coffers, to replenish which
He merely follows her.

EMILY.

His practice 'twas
Which to this issue led—on some account
I know not—nay, nor guess. He durst not treat
Sir Valentine with overbearing mien,
So took advantage of fair Hero's weakness,
To play upon't, expose, and with disgust
Surfeit the man he fear'd.

SIR WILLIAM.

And he succeeded?

EMILY.

Ay, to the full, Sir, as I have possess'd you.

SIR WILLIAM.

I am sorry for it. He had begun to love her,
And would have made to her a worthy husband;

Safe guardian to her wealth; and one to make
A proud wife of a higher dame than she!
It crossly hath fallen out. But she is piqued,
You say, at his desertion?

EMILY.

Much, Sir!—Much!
She wept, as I acquainted you.

SIR WILLIAM.

You did,
And matter see I there. Unfeigned tears—
And such were her's—from deep-laid fountains flow,
Abiding in the heart! The argument
Which draws them thence, as deep must even go.
A curling lip I had not heeded—that
Were simple scorn—but they who weep for scorn
Do weep for something more. Sir Valentine
Hath not his peer in England! Trust me, girl,
She's not so blind with folly, as not to see
His paramount desert.—Where is she?

EMILY.

Lock'd
In her chamber with her milliner,—so says
Her maid. These three hours have I crav'd admission,
But all in vain; she has not yet press'd pillow
Sufficient to repair her spirits from
The waste of yesternight.

SIR WILLIAM.

A wayward girl!
New dresses, pleasures, lovers—all things new,
Except herself. Would that would change as well!

Some mode she studies with her minister
 Of novelty, will flog all former folly. [Knocking.]
 What sober knock is that?—Such seldom calls
 At her fantastic door. Who knocks?

Enter SERVANT.

SERVANT.

A man,
 Of formal habit and consorting speech,
 Usher to one most young and fair; a maid
 Who seems to know no use for beauty, but
 To mortify it with ungainly guise.
 She asks to see the mistress of the house.

SIR WILLIAM.

Admit her!—On what errand can she come?

*[Servant goes out, and returns, shewing in CLEVER, followed
 by HERO, both disguised as Quakers.]*

Who art thou?

CLEVER.

Man unto Ruth Mapleson,
 Who with the woman of the house would speak.

SIR WILLIAM.

The woman of the house!

EMILY.

Ruth Mapleson!

HERO.

Friend, am I right? This house of vanity,
 Is't the abode of that unfortunate
 They call the city maid? who to the use
 Of one, perverts what Heaven did lavishly
 Commit unto her, for the good of many!
 Is this her house?—and if it is, I pray you

Acquaint her that a sister, pitying
 Her hapless state of blindness, ignorance,
 Omission and offence, hath come to her
 To clear her vision, to inform her mind,
 To teach her occupation, and from evil
 To turn her steps aside.—Umph !

CLEVER.

Umph !

SIR WILLIAM.

My breath
 Is almost stopp'd with wonder !

EMILY.

So is mine.
 What can it mean ?

SIR WILLIAM.

Some poor fanatic 'tis,
 Whose zeal hath warp'd her reason.

HERO.

Sinful man !
 Thus is it with the children of the flesh ;
 What argues wisdom they misconstrue madness !
 Tho' through perverseness rather than conviction.
 Tremble !—Look down !—Abase thee to the dust !
 Should'st thou not blush at thy grey hairs, the vouchers
 For thriftless years, for profitless experience !
 'Tis winter with thee—harvest-time is past—
 What hast thou garner'd ? Chaff instead of grain !
 What doest thou with gauds like these, thy trappings ?
 Why standest thou beneath this roof of pride,
 That shouldst be thinking of the charnel-house
 And the attire of its inhabitant ?
 I know thee uncle to that maid of lightness,

That mistress of this house of emptiness,
And whom I come to chasten and to teach!
Umph!

CLEVER.

Umph!

EMILY.

Dear Sir! who is't? I grow uneasy!
With strangeness yet familiarity
She strikes me, that consist not! I do feel
As though an apparition stood before me,
And wish she were away!

SIR WILLIAM.

And so do I!

HERO (*to Emily*).

And thou, poor flesh and blood!—illusion! heirdom
O' the worm! that think'st thyself all soundness, yet
Art all corruption! Why abid'st thou in
The lazar-house? Depart from it! Pull off
Its dress, and don the clean and wholesome guise
Of plainness and humility—Umph!

CLEVER.

Umph!

SIR WILLIAM.

This bold intrusion and address—

HERO.

Peace, Satan!
And yet, perhaps I wrong you! Privily
You may condemn proud Hero's fantasies?

SIR WILLIAM.

I do.

EMILY.

And so do I.

HERO.

O do you so ?

Then are ye not, as I did reckon you,
O' the children of the Prince of Darkness ?

SIR WILLIAM *and* EMILY.

No.

HERO.

You see that she is very vain ?

EMILY.

We else were blind.

SIR WILLIAM.

Stone blind !

HERO.

Capricious ?

EMILY.

As many moods as there's hours in the day.

SIR WILLIAM.

Say minutes, rather !

HERO.

Fond of pleasure ?

EMILY.

Her constant occupation.

SIR WILLIAM.

'Tis her meat

And drink ; rest, business, studies, prayers, and sleep !

HERO.

She hath no constancy in aught—

Lovers especially ?

EMILY.

She changes them

Too often.

SIR WILLIAM.

She doth use them as her dresses !
Shew her a new one, she casts off the last,
How new soe'er put on.

HERO.

I pity her.

EMILY.

She scarce deserves it.

SIR WILLIAM.

Pity is too good
For such a piece of waywardness, perverseness,
Pride, folly, fantasy, and emptiness !

HERO.

So then we are all of the same mind ?

EMILY.

Exactly.

SIR WILLIAM.

Not a pin's point difference !

HERO.

You would approve that I reform her then ?

EMILY.

Reform her ! could you do so ? Do so.

SIR WILLIAM.

Do !

Do ! Make her anything but what she is.

EMILY.

Change cannot fail to better her.

SIR WILLIAM.

No change

Can make her worse !—Reform her, pray !

HERO.

I will.

SIR WILLIAM *and* EMILY.

When?

HERO.

When you take her for another thing
 And find her just the same!—Oh, uncle, fie!
 Fie, Emily! is this your loyalty?

SIR WILLIAM.

What means this metamorphosis?

HERO.

Defence

Of my sex's rights—assertion of my own!
 Instruction to that master-work, call'd man!
 Protest and re-establishment of due
 Prerogative! reduction of rebellion,
 Compell'd from reared crest to bended knee!
 Pains, penalties, bonds, confiscations, deaths,
 To follow thereupon!

SIR WILLIAM.

Why, niece, what wind
 Doth bring this sudden storm?

HERO.

Are you a man?

SIR WILLIAM.

I trust I am!

HERO.

Then if you are, you know
 The privileges of a single woman.
 We have few, Heav'n help us! when we change the state
 Most rightly dubb'd of single blessedness!
 Is 't not a single woman's right to rule?

SIR WILLIAM.

It is.

HERO.

To have her will her law?

SIR WILLIAM.

It is.

HERO.

To have as many tastes, moods, fits, as she likes?

SIR WILLIAM.

It is.

HERO.

To come, to go, to smile, to frown,
To please, to pain, to love, to hate, do aught
Without dispute?

SIR WILLIAM.

It is.

HERO.

Is't not enough,
You have leave to look upon her—listen to her—
Stand in her presence—wait upon her? Must
Her 'haviour, speech, be what you like, or what
It likes her sovereign self that they should be?

SIR WILLIAM.

What likes her sovereign self!

HERO.

You *are* a man!
Would all your sex were like you! Who are not,
Are not for me, believe me! Look you, uncle!
I'll make the saucy traitor feel my power,
Or I will break my heart! He thinks me fair—
I thank him! Well-proportioned—very much
Beholden to him! Dignified and graceful—

A man of shrewd perception ! very !—send him
On expedition of discovery !

SIR WILLIAM.

Whom mean you, Hero ?

HERO.

Whom ?—Sir Valentine !

He has made his bow ! Indeed, a gracious one—
A stately, courtly, condescending one !
Ne'er may I courtsey, if he bow not lower !
I'll bring him to his knees as a spoiled child
With uplift hands that asketh pardon, then
Command him up, and never see me more !

SIR WILLIAM.

Why, how hath this befallen ?

HERO.

I did not dance
To please him ! No, Sir ! He is a connoisseur
In dancing !—hath a notion of his own
Of a step ! In carriage, attitude, has taste,
Dainty as palate of an epicure,
Which, if you hit not to a hair, disgust
Doth take the place of zest ! He is sick of me !
My feet the frolic measure may indulge,
But not my heart—mine eye, my cheek, my lip,
Must not be cognizant of what I do—
As wood and marble could be brought to dance,
And look like wood and marble ! I shall teach him
Another style ! Come ! I have found you out ;
Will you compound for your sedition,
And help me ? Come ! how say you, little traitress ?

EMILY.

Content.

HERO.

And you, most reverend rebellion?

SIR WILLIAM.

Command me aught, that I can do in reason.

HERO.

Can do in reason! In what reason? There
 Are fifty kinds of reason! There's a fool's reason,
 And a wise man's reason, and a knave's reason, and
 An honest man's reason, and an infant's reason,
 And reason of a grandfather—but there's
 A reason 'bove them all, and that alone
 Can stand me now in stead—a woman's reason!
 Wilt thou be subject unto me in that?

SIR WILLIAM.

I will.

But tell me whence this speech of solemn phrase?

HERO.

From one I knew and lov'd at school—a girl
 Half, by the sect that practise it, brought up.
 But she of thought and will therewith consorting,
 The mistress likewise was—most veritable.
 Her name was Helen Mowbray—by the arts
 Of that same lord to whom I owe the coil
 I would unwind me from, and whom, thro' whim,
 Not liking, I have countenanc'd. 'Tis said
 She fell—but not in my belief. How is this?
 I am growing serious! You will help me?

SIR WILLIAM.

Yes.

HERO.

That's my good Uncle! That's a darling Uncle!
 There ne'er was kinder, nor more sensible!

A good, dear, wise, obedient, docile Uncle !
Give me a kiss ! Hence, Master Clever ! Do
What I directed you—Sir Valentine
Is not yet out. Invite him where I told you—
To the house at Greenwich. [*Exit* CLEVER.]

SIR WILLIAM.

What dost thou intend ?

HERO.

Order the carriage—no ; it must be one
They lend for hire :—and come along with me—
I'll tell you on the way. Emily !—Uncle !
Look you ! (*throws her glove down*) I'll have him, as my glove
that there,
At my feet doth lie, till I do pick him up !
And I will pick him up—but in a way !
There !—give it me again—O, you dear Uncle,
To help my plot !—do, what I wish !—You ought
To be an Uncle ! There's another kiss !
And if I do not make him kiss the rod,
I'm ne'er a niece deserving such an Uncle !
Come ! come !—I did not dance to please him ! Come.

[*They go out.*]

SCENE III.

SIR VALENTINE'S *House.**Enter* SIR VALENTINE.

SIR VALENTINE.

Oh, pitiable case! so rich a stamp,
 And yet the metal base! For what high things
 Did nature fashion her!—whose rich intent
 Had she but half fulfill'd, no wealth, no state
 That earth can furnish, for aggrandizement
 Of craving and insatiate ambition,
 Conferr'd on her, had given her half her due,
 Far less its debtor made her! Misery!
 To find the good we hop'd, the bane we hate!
 Hate!—O, perverse and doubtful course of love,
 That in the goal it pants for, finds its grave!
 That reaches for a bliss, and clasps a pang!
 That now doth own a mine, and naught anon!
 O beggary most poor, that from the lapse
 Of dwindled riches grows!

Enter SERVANT.

SERVANT.

You are wanted, Sir—

SIR VALENTINE.

Who wants me?

SERVANT.

One who brings an errand from
 Sir William Sutton, and craves speech with you.

SIR VALENTINE.

Admit him.
Well?

[SERVANT *goes out.*—*Enter* CLEVER.

CLEVER.

Are you the man they call
Sir Valentine de Grey?

SIR VALENTINE.

That man am I.

CLEVER.

Then, being he, another man they call
Sir William Sutton, sends me here to pray
Thy company this afternoon, to meet
Some friends who dine with him at Greenwich.

SIR VALENTINE.

Say,
I cannot come.

CLEVER.

Art thou engaged, friend?

SIR VALENTINE.

No.

CLEVER.

Then thou speak'st not true. Thou can'st come.

SIR VALENTINE.

Say,
I will not come.

CLEVER.

He bade me say to thee
Thou *must* come.

SIR VALENTINE.

Must come

CLEVER.

Yes ; so come along.
For he did charge me bring thee, and I said
I would ; and not to bring thee, were to break
My word, and make him angry.

SIR VALENTINE.

Tell him, then,
I was not in.

CLEVER.

I will not tell a lie.

SIR VALENTINE.

Art thou his servant ?

CLEVER.

No ; but man to one
That's niece unto him—that is, in the flesh—
Not in the spirit.

SIR VALENTINE.

Wherefore ?

CLEVER.

Know'st thou him,
And know'st thou not he is a man of sin ?
Ruth Mapleson is of the faithful !

SIR VALENTINE.

Who ?

CLEVER.

Ruth Mapleson.

SIR VALENTINE.

I know no niece he hath,
Save one—fair Mistress Sutton.

CLEVER.

Name her not—
Daughter of darkness.

SIR VALENTINE.

Liar !

CLEVER.

Thou dost lie
To call me so.

SIR VALENTINE.

Wretch !

CLEVER.

Thou dost lie again.
I am a godly and a happy man,
That waits upon Ruth Mapleson ; the niece
Of him they call Sir William Sutton ; and
Cousin to Hero Sutton, whom in naught
Doth Ruth resemble save her face and form,
Where she might pass for her, she is so like her.

SIR VALENTINE.

So like her ! said'st thou, like her ?

CLEVER.

Thou didst hear
I did ; so like her, 'twere a cunning eye
Could tell the one from the other. That's my hand ;
I take 't away, and show it thee again :
Is that another hand ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Knave, 'tis the same.

CLEVER.

Miscall me not, friend ! Knave is not my name,
But Obadiah. Use me civilly,
That do instruct thee, who art ignorant.
Not more in likeness is that hand the same,
Than Hero Sutton is Ruth Mapleson
In feature, figure, face, complexion, all

That makes the outward woman—but within,
Winter and summer are not less akin!

SIR VALENTINE.

How, knave?

CLEVER.

I told thee not to call me “knave;”
My name is Obadiah.

SIR VALENTINE.

Obadiah
I'll call thee then. How are these cousins as
Unlike as winter is to summer?

CLEVER.

Thus.—Is winter barren? so is the maiden Hero; is it made up of fogs and rain? so is the maiden Hero of vapours and the spleen; hath it much cloud, and little sun? so hath the maiden Hero great discontent, small content; hath it long night, and brief day? so hath the maiden Hero lasting displeasure, short favour; is there any depending upon it? no more is there upon the maiden Hero; do you wish it heartily away? so would you be rid of the maiden Hero.

SIR VALENTINE.

I fear thou art a slanderer.

CLEVER.

I see
Thou lack'st good manners, which is grievous, friend,
In one of thy degree. Thou callest names
As scavengers that quarrel in the streets
Most unbecomingly!

SIR VALENTINE.

Well; now proceed.
What of her cousin?

CLEVER.

Tho' a godly man,
Yet am I flesh and blood, and thou dost vex
My spirit, friend, by so misusing me.
I tell thee once again, my name is not
Liar, nor knave, nor slanderer, nor aught
But Obadiah.

SIR VALENTINE.

Well—enough of that;
Her cousin? Come! Her cousin?

CLEVER.

Tho' I am
A man of peace, I am a valiant man.
I combat not, but yet the elements
Of war are given me, friend! I am full of them,
Save what is in me of the goodly thing
That mortifies the flesh, and keeps them in
Subjection! Yea, I am a warlike man!
Yea, verily, a very warlike man!

SIR VALENTINE.

I ask thy pardon.

CLEVER.

I do grant it thee;
Thou dost a proper thing; and now shalt hear,
Wherein the maiden Ruth, who, outwardly,
Is to the maiden Hero what that maiden
Is to herself, is, inwardly, reverse
As summer is to winter.

SIR VALENTINE.

Prithee on!

CLEVER.

Is summer fertile? is summer clear? hath it little cloud, much sun, long day and short night—and that more like day, than night? is summer constant, and do you wish it never away? so is the maiden Ruth bounteous; so is the maiden Ruth cheerful; so hath she twenty smiles for one frown; lasting favour, brief displeasure, which you would almost take to be favour; so is she little liable to change; so would you wish to have her ever with you!

SIR VALENTINE.

Where dwells this cousin?

CLEVER.

In Greenwich, friend, whither thou goest; not in the same house with him that sends for thee—for light dwelleth not with darkness—but in another habitation, where her books, and her flowers, and her own sweet thoughts, which are fairer and wiser than either, are her only companions.

SIR VALENTINE.

I'll go with thee to Greenwich. Lead on!

CLEVER.

Hold, friend!—You must do all things soberly.

[They go out, CLEVER preceding, with extreme gravity.]

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE 1.

The Outskirts of London.

Enter EUSTACE and WALSINGHAM.

EUSTACE.

Now for the confidence you promised me.

WALSINGHAM.

Can'st thou not guess my story? Look at me!
Seem my years more than his you'd reckon in
Life's outset, when beneath our feet all 's flowers,
Above our heads all sun? Can'st not divine
What could alone o'ercrest and wither thus?
Nor only take away the adjuncts sweet
Of that fair prime of hope, but prospect leave
Of nought but cloud and barrenness?

EUSTACE.

Ambition?

WALSINGHAM.

No; that's an after-game. There's one we play
Before, o'er which the heart doth throb, as o'er
None other! where we throw the die, whose turn
Nine times in ten 's the oracle foretells
All chance to come! which, if we play in earnest—

And light are they, who of that game make light—
 We make ourselves for ever, or lose all,
 Doubling the value of our being, or
 Reducing it to naught!—a game, methinks,
 Which you have play'd at—Love.—Am I not right?

EUSTACE.

You are.

WALSINGHAM.

You didn't win?

EUSTACE (*hesitatingly*).

I—didn't.

WALSINGHAM.

How?

You speak as one that yet did neither lose—
 Whose game not yet was out—a chance, altho'
 With heavy odds against him. Mark me; if
 Thou hast rivals whom she entertains like thee,
 With just so much of hope as doth suffice
 To keep them suitors still, while each can say,
 She's mine, as well as t'other—give her up!
 Away with her! Abandon her for ever!
 Thou woo'st, what, if thou win'st—the tongue is kind—
 Not that doth give thee joy—but wish thee dead!
 The keeper, not the owner, of a thing
 Wherein is lock'd thy life, and thy life's gems—
 Thy peace and honor dear!

EUSTACE.

Won such a maid
 Thy love?

WALSINGHAM.

Not such a maid ! No ; she did live
Forbid to all but me. The statue's ear
And eye, you'd think, as much perception had
Of wonder at the consummate chisel's skill,
As her's of praise from others' eyes and tongues.
But, oh ! at lightest glance or sound of mine,
How would the rich and fair-wrought marble glow !

EUSTACE.

Thou mourn'st her dead, then ?

WALSINGHAM.

Dead ?—Ay, dead ! a corpse,
A mouldering corpse, that's with corruption hous'd,
Which skill medicinal can ne'er restore
To its sweet life again !—the which to weep
Is all that fondest eyes may look for now.
The life, alas ! of her fair honor's gone !

EUSTACE.

What ! liv'd she but for thee, and gave she up
Her richest jewel to another ?

WALSINGHAM.

You
Shall hear my story. What in form she was,
I will not paint to you.—Each lover has,
You know, the fairest she—say, mine's a paragon
As much as thine—nay, of the very charm
That's crest of all, thou wilt but make a seat
To mount some plume of her's, whom thou affect'st,
That shall transcend it far ! I know it—so
Forbear. Yet had you e'er set eyes upon her !

Oh! she did stand alone! To truest hearts
 The sight of her was wonderful estrangement,
 Weaning them for a time from things, how'er
 Clung dotingly to before—that mistresses
 Have sadden'd to see eyes, that blaz'd on them
 Ere they were turn'd away, turn back again
 Listless and icy cold! Riches and rank,
 Bestudded o'er and gilded, have look'd blank
 To see themselves outshone without a gem!
 Nay, very hostesses, whose only care
 Was to behold their costly huswifry
 Approv'd, have been discomfited to see
 Their tables crown'd as ne'er they were before,
 And she the only garnish of the board!

EUSTACE.

Thought you not others' eyes did see like yours?

WALSINGHAM.

No! no! I saw they did—I felt they did—
 Felt it thro' many a pang of doubt—but not
 Thro' fear of her demerits, but my own!

EUSTACE.

Nc'er gave she cause to doubt?

WALSINGHAM.

No!

EUSTACE.

Still she fail'd?

WALSINGHAM.

As life—when health, that is the heart of life,
 Seems sound to the very core! has ne'er given sign
 Of flaw or speck—this moment in the bloom—
 The next, is blasted!

EUSTACE.

What you do assert,
 The more you do assert, the more I doubt !
 What ! truth to falsehood in a moment turn ?
 Virtue to vice ? Love to estrangement ? Love !
 And in a woman ! Had she lov'd before ?

WALSINGHAM.

No !

EUSTACE.

Her first love, too ! But she was a child ?

WALSINGHAM.

No ; in the blush of bursting womanhood.

EUSTACE.

And left thee for another ? No declining
 Of that first passion ? Never seen to wane—
 A little now—now more ? but all at once
 Go out ! Impossible ! You've been deceiv'd !
 Abus'd ! you have ! my life, my soul upon it !

WALSINGHAM.

They're costly pledges to be forfeited ;
 Then risk them not !

EUSTACE.

What can'st thou set against them ?

WALSINGHAM.

Proofs ! facts !

EUSTACE.

Facts ?

WALSINGHAM.

Facts ! *My* cause thou wast engag'd in ?
 How is't I find thee in another's listed ?

EUSTACE.

What is the cause of her thou lov'st, but thine?

WALSINGHAM.

Not if she's false.

EUSTACE.

But if she's true?

WALSINGHAM.

She's not!

By truth, she's not!

EUSTACE.

By truth, she *is*!—unless,
 Things, that do coincide much as the East
 And West—high Heaven and the Abyss—noonday
 And midnight—reason and madness—contraries
 Confess'd and palpable—for so oppos'd,
 I own, do your averments seem to me—
 You prove are in accordance.

WALSINGHAM.

Listen, then!

Who wins a prize, thou know'st wins envy too.
 With such a prize thou wilt not wonder then
 That many grudg'd my fortune! 'Mong the rest
 Was one—a satire on the saucy code
 That makes the wreath of merit birth-right, when
 No law can make the grace that wins it so.
 This titled profligate alone, no check,
 Reserve, rebuke, rejection, could divert
 From pressing still his suit: my arm had tried it,
 But that she hung upon it, minding me
 The life I'd peril was the heart of her's!
 She did!—and for enforcement show'd to me

Vouchers on vouchers—genuine sighs and tears !
Art couldn't feign such—I'll do justice to her—
She then was true—as true as haggard since !
Why weep'st thou ?

EUSTACE.

Thou dost weep ; and tears draw tears,
When grief itself doth fail.

WALSINGHAM.

Then dry your eyes ;
You'll ne'er see mine again ! you think me lost
To honour ?

EUSTACE.

No !

WALSINGHAM.

What not to weep a wanton ?

EUSTACE.

O, not a wanton !

WALSINGHAM.

How !

EUSTACE.

Not *then* a wanton !

WALSINGHAM.

Not then ! The devil was once an angel—what
Of that ? He fell !—who weeps him ? no one ! What
Tho' she was once a spirit of light, as he was,
When now she's black as he ?

EUSTACE.

Nay !

WALSINGHAM.

Doubt it not !
 To cavil at the right we feel to writhe
 Is aggravation, that adds wrong to wrong,
 And drives before-o'erburthen'd patience mad !
 The sun did stare upon it !—'twas not lewdness
 Chamber'd—behind the curtain—'twas i'the street,
 Light as noonday could make it !—without cloak !
 Hood ! veil !—Now call it questionable ! Nothing
 To mask the wanton !—Oh ! for a thunderbolt,
 To strike me then !—From a noted, libell'd stew,
 Led by the noble libertine—his trophy,
 Worn on his arm in the gaze of every eye—
 I saw her issue.

EUSTACE.

Did she shun thee ?

WALSINGHAM.

No !

EUSTACE.

That was a proof of innocence.

WALSINGHAM.

Of guilt !
 Rank ! rank !—a sudden and entire infection,
 A touch and rottenness ! as from the bite
 Of a serpent, in an instant ruddy life
 To black corruption grows ! Why should she shun me ?
 She had her tale at hand ! 'Twas but to make
 Her paramour her friend ; their assignation,
 A freak of chance ; her reconcilment to
 A man she loath'd before, a debt ; and for
 That debt assign a cause equivalent ;—

All which she did in a breath ! 'Twas clear, Sir ; clear !
 The truth spoke for itself ! Fact born of fact—
 Nought out of place or disproportionate !
 As obviously that follow'd this ; this that ;
 As this doth chime with this, and that with that !
 A thing one must believe ! From end to end,
 A lie, Sir !—He had sav'd her from a villain !
 The villain ! When appeal'd to, he did damn her !
 “ He fain would bear her out ! His life was her's !—
 “ His fortune—but upon a point of honour—
 “ In question with a man of honour—not
 “ That he denied her fair averments tho'—
 “ He pray'd she would excuse him !”

EUSTACE.

You believ'd him !
 Him you believ'd, that ne'er was true before !
 Her disbeliev'd, was ne'er before but true ?

WALSINGHAM.

She did admit it.

EUSTACE.

How ?

WALSINGHAM.

By damning silence !

EUSTACE.

Is't guilt alone, convicted, that keeps silence ?
 Guilt—saucy guilt—that dares to break the law
 Of God and man ! Remember you no case,
 Where innocence accus'd hath all at once
 Been stricken dumb ?—appall'd to undergo
 The charge of sin, that never could endure
 The thought of sin ? Appearances against her,

And witness for her none, but her own heart ?
 Her very blood betraying her, deserting
 Its post upon her cheek, whence, were it bold
 As honest, 'fore a host 'twould ne'er give way !
 Remember you no case like this ? or if
 Your memory none records, is such a one
 So much at odds with probability,
 Your fancy cannot image it ? A woman,
 Young, charily brought up, as vestal for
 The fane ! Suppose a novice so sincere,
 She lov'd and knew it not, till, by its signs,
 Others more skill'd did find the passion out,
 And tell her that she loved !

WALSINGHAM.

Thou draw'st herself !

EUSTACE.

And such a one, by accident or plot,
 Sudden to stand in such predicament
 As of her honour valid question founds—
 In presence too of him whose value for
 The gem doth make it doubly, trebly, dear—
 And then, appealing to a villain's truth,
 To find the tongue, should clear, but blurr'd her more !—
 Oh ! I would ask for signs of life as soon
 From lips of stone, as look for words from her's !
 She couldn't speak ! Speak ? breathe ! she would be stunn'd
 To utter lapse of every sense, except
 That at her heart, which told it at that time
 It would be bliss to break ! Should she be true
 At last—

WALSINGHAM.

No more of this !

EUSTACE.

Have I not shaken—
Not much, but somewhat—say, a little—say,
A very little—your belief of her
Dishonour ?

WALSINGHAM.

Speak not of her.

EUSTACE.

If she is pure,
Despite appearances, as first you thought her ;
Constant, despite desertion ; and despite
Wrongs, scornings, brandings, fond ;—it may be fonder—
For woman's love's a plant, I've often heard,
Which mocketh all that thrive in winter time,
Not only keeping green, but growing then.

WALSINGHAM.

You take, methinks, strange interest in her fate !

EUSTACE.

I have a friend, whose fate resembles her's—
Whose cause I'm sworn to right ! Besides, we're friends.
Thou art not happy ?

WALSINGHAM.

No.

EUSTACE.

I'd see thee so.
To have thee so, I'd wish thee in the wrong.
She's not forgotten—is she ?

WALSINGHAM.

Would she were !

EUSTACE.

Perhaps thou lov'st her still ?

WALSINGHAM.

To madness ! There's
 My malady. I love her—not what she is,
 But what she was. What's present—that's her swerving,
 That's palpable, which you may see, touch, handle,
 Define, weigh, prove by any test is real—
 Feels but a phantasm, a conceit, a dream,
 A horrible one !—in contrast with what's past,
 Her worth, her love, her constancy, that vanish'd
 Or e'er you question'd them.

EUSTACE.

Art sure of that ?
 Come, come, thou'rt not, at least, thou'rt not quite sure.
 Now did she stand before thee undismay'd,
 Confiding in thy honour—say thy patience—
 Say thy endurance—

WALSINGHAM.

If my eyes could look
 The mandate of my soul, they would flash lightning on her,
 To blast her where she stood ! What ails thee ?

EUSTACE.

Nought—
 What did I do ? How did I look ? What saw'st,
 To ask ? Did I turn pale, or start, or what ?
 Do I tremble ? Feel !—I am past fear, grief, pain,
 As death ! Give me thy arm, and come with me.
 I'll shew thee what a piece of rock thou thought'st
 Did quake. Thou a false woman, as thou think'st her,
 Would'st revenge—I would revenge a woman wrong'd,
 Bitterly wrong'd ; so wrong'd, that after her
 None should complain of hardship ! Come and see,
 Which holds his purpose most tenaciously. [They go out.]

SCENE II.

A Chamber in HERO'S House at Greenwich.

Enter SIR VALENTINE and CLEVER.

SIR VALENTINE.

I tell thee, I must see her !

CLEVER.

Friend, thy face,
Albeit no modest one, thy deeds outdo
In forwardness ! I brought thee but to see
The maiden's house—and thou would'st enter it !
Nor therewith rest'st content—but must have speech
With her that owns it, and escheweth thee
As all ungodly things !

SIR VALENTINE.

And I will have it !
So tell thyself—but gently say to her,
A stranger craveth audience. Mind—a stranger.
And do my bidding ; else I may forget
Thou art a man of peace, and, may be, beat thee.
Yea—beat thee—I repeat it ! and, I pray thee,
Make me not do 't again !

CLEVER.

I will submit—
'Ere I will use the argument o' th' flesh,
For that would hurt my spirit. Umph ! I am gone !

[*Exits out.*]

SIR VALENTINE.

So far, so well ! Admittance I have gain'd,
 And now an audience wait—but doubtingly.
 Her cousin !—Then behoves me change my name,
 Else, knowing me for Hero's suitor, she
 Will spurn me. Yes ! I'll even call myself
 Sir Launcelot de Vere.—Can this be she ?
 The knave hath mock'd me—and the world of hopes
 That sudden rose to my imagining
 Doth melt to nothing.—Stay !—It forms again !
 It grows to probability.—No vapour
 That takes a passing form, is here and gone,
 But a sincere and palpable creation !
 Another Hero is there—or I do see
 The same !—Oh, likeness to beholding, e'en
 Incredible ! that makes with wonderment
 The vision waver, and the utterance fail !

Enter HERO (disguised as before).

HERO.

Well ? What's your will ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Forgive me, lady, if,
 With occupation of mine eyes, awhile
 I did forget the office of my tongue
 To give thee 'custom'd salutation.
 Still would I gaze, nor speak ; art what thou seem'st ?

HERO.

What seem I, friend ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Likeness—unlikeness ! A thing

Most different—and yet the very same !
What I would give averment of most strong—
Again most strong deny ! The form of the bane,
With the sweet virtue of the antidote !
'The rose, was canker'd yesterday, to-day
Freshness and soundness to the very core !
Oh beauty ! that doth know its proper pride,
And nothing deigns to ask to set it off
Except simplicity, that offers nought,
Yet all that's due performs ! I have not liv'd
Till now !—I have but dealt with shows of life,
Automatons, that do not know themselves,
But act from causes are no part of them !
But here is nature's mechanism—mind
And soul—a body fitting them, informing
With motions of their own.

HERO.

Friend, art thou mad ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Mad, lady ?

HERO.

Rational, thou canst not be !

SIR VALENTINE.

Not rational ?

HERO.

If that—which much I doubt—
Certain not favour'd with the grace of truth.

SIR VALENTINE.

Doubt'st thou I utter aught but truth ?

HERO.

I doubt
 Thy wits, thy wisdom, or thy truth. Not mad,
 Thou art not wise—if wise, thou speak'st not truth.
 And sooth to say, thy dress of vanity,
 Thy looks of wildness, and thy air assur'd,
 Where one who knew propriety would feel
 Disturbance—this abrupt intrusion, which
 Nor leave, nor introduction, nor acquaintance
 Doth justify—approve thee void of truth,
 Unwise, or mad!—if none of these, a man
 Of cloddish nature, base and ignorant!

SIR VALENTINE.

Oh! say not cloddish nature! Say not base
 Nor ignorant! It is the dignity
 Of man, that the bright stars do tempt his mind
 To scan the empyrean where they sit,
 Plac'd infinite beyond terrestrial reach,
 And scan their uses and their essences,—
 High argument of his affinity
 To him that made them, and the immortal light
 That shall outlast this filmy shadowy sphere
 Whereon they look and smile! 'Twas told to me
 That thou wast perfect fair—I doubted that,
 For I had found, methought, the paragon
 Of beauty's wealth in woman! then 'twas said
 That thou wast wise—I wish'd thee that, for still,
 Tho' oft at fault, in noble house I have lodg'd
 Noble inhabitant! 'twas said again
 That thou wast good—then I believ'd thee wise,
 For wisdom should bear goodness or no fruit!
 And, good and wise, believ'd thee fairest too,

And coveted ! Nor come I without leave—
Thy simple life eschewing worldly forms,
Was pledge for leave ! Nor lack I introduction
That honest errand bring to vouch for me.
Nor, least of all, acquaintance—I have known thee
Since matur'd thought, my nature's fondest wish
Informing, told it loveliness of soul,
Yet more than body, doth belong to woman,
And, therewith when abiding, doth make up
The highest sum that earthly happiness
Amounts to—nearest what we hope in Heaven.

HERO.

Friend, dost thou know thou talkest to a worm ?

SIR VALENTINE.

A worm ?

HERO.

A mite !

SIR VALENTINE.

A mite ?

HERO.

Nor yet a mite—
A congregate of evils, whereunto
The worm and mite are strangers !

SIR VALENTINE.

Evils !

HERO.

Know'st not
That beauty will take cold ? will have the tooth-ache ?
Will catch a fever ?—that its peachy cheek
Will canker in a night ?—that it's sweet lips,

Palace of smiles, spasm doth compel to change
 Their garish tenants for uncouth contortions?
 That its fair dress of pride—its velvet skin—
 Humours will spot, discolour?—that, in brief,
 It is a thing in value vanishing
 As fickle merchandise, which rates to-day
 Enormously—the next, may go a begging?
 And, worse than all, that its chief merit lies
 In wishing, not possessing?—coveted,
 Of purchase measureless—obtain'd, worth nothing?

SIR VALENTINE.

Thou mean'st the beauty that but meets the eye?

HERO.

I mean the beauty thou alone dost see,
 And prov'st thou only see'st. Why, what pains
 Thou takest with a common piece of clay
 To set it off! a fine account to turn
 The bow of God to—meant for spiritual,
 And not corporeal use—with divers tints
 To clothe thy body! besides lading it
 With the mind's produce—gems and metals—proof
 Far more *without* concerns thee than *within*!
 Oh! that a nature of immortal reach
 Should house its aspirations in a crib
 Like this poor tiny world! and, taught to look
 Above the coronets of the fair stars,
 Go proud with grains of dust and gossamer,
 The property of things inferior to him,
 As motes unto the sun! But I forget—thy errand?

SIR VALENTINE.

Love!

HERO.

'Tis clear, thou'rt mad ! What ! love
Whom thou did'st never see ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Nay, pardon me
And let thy patience lend me audience, while
I show thee my credentials, on the faith
Of which I come. I have seen thee very oft—

HERO.

Stark mad !

SIR VALENTINE.

Nay, rational—as rational
As reason in its sober'st, perfect mood—
Held converse with thee, countless times.

HERO.

Broke loose
From Bedlam !

SIR VALENTINE.

Walk'd and sat with thee—

HERO.

I trust
Thy keeper is at hand !

SIR VALENTINE.

He came with me.

HERO.

Where is he ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Here, altho' thou see'st him not.
My keeper's Love. I have woo'd thee for a month !

HERO.

Ho! help!

SIR VALENTINE.

Be not alarm'd.

HERO.

Nay, touch me not!

When did'st thou break thy chains?

SIR VALENTINE.

I wear them yet;

The subtle ones that self-same beauty forg'd,

Which now I look upon—most gorgeous dress,

But by another worn.

HERO.

Oh! you have lov'd

One that resembles me.

SIR VALENTINE.

I have.

HERO.

'Tis not

A fit, then?

SIR VALENTINE.

No; for fits are vanishing.

This is a mood like nature's, lasts for life.

Enter CLEVER.

CLEVER.

Why did'st thou call? I heard thy voice, in fear.

HERO.

All's well, good Obadiah.

CLEVER.

Is it so?

Then I may go again. Young man, beware

Thou frighten'st not that maiden. We are meek,
And offer not offence ; but meeting it,
As injury will make the worm rebel,
We turn, and we are strong—yea, very strong !
Whose wrath, albeit a pebble, hath avail
To smite a giant !—therefore, tempt it not !
Umph !

[*Exit.*

HERO.

Thou hast known a maiden like me ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Yes ;
I have lov'd a maid, most like thee—most unlike ;
Without, as costly—but within, as poor
To thee, as penury to affluence.

HERO.

And did'st thou love and woo her for a month,
And a defaulter thus ? 'Twas grievous lack
Of penetration.

SIR VALENTINE.

Nay, 'twas specious show
That valid credit won.

HERO.

Thou art a man
Like all thy worldly class, of shallow mind.
Thy heart is in thine eyes : what pleaseth them
Is sure of that.

SIR VALENTINE.

Nay, I had then lov'd on.

HERO.

What cur'd thy love ?

SIR VALENTINE.

I saw her in a dance
Light nature show—

HERO.

A dance! Oh! I have heard
Of such a thing. An idle pastime. What
But folly comes of folly? Do you dance?

SIR VALENTINE.

I do.

HERO.

What kind of a thing is it? Come, shew me!

SIR VALENTINE.

I pray you to excuse me.

HERO.

Nay, but dance.

SIR VALENTINE.

I pray you, ask me not.

HERO.

Thou dancest badly?

SIR VALENTINE.

Nay, I have won some credit in the dance.

HERO.

Then do the thing thou hast won credit by.

SIR VALENTINE.

I cannot.

HERO.

Friend, thou art asham'd to dance.

SIR VALENTINE.

Nay, not asham'd.

HERO.

Then dance !

SIR VALENTINE.

'Twere out of time
And place.

HERO.

What, out of time and place, and to
A man of gallantry, to do the thing
A lady wishes him ; and he the while
On sufferance in her presence ! I do see !
Thou art in a grave mood, and for a man to dance,
And look like Solomon, I must suppose
Were more offence to seriousness, than wear
A cap and bells. Friend, it is very clear
Thou canst not dance, and look like a wise man—
Yet thou didst woo a lady, thou did'st say,
And cast her off, because she did not dance
With gravity !

SIR VALENTINE.

She danced with lightness more
Than lightest measure warranted. No thing
A modest woman does—say that it touches
The utmost verge of license—but that cincture,
Of better proof than zone of adamant,
Its holy and offence-repelling fires
Doth wave around her, that the libertine,
Unwon by honour, yet is tam'd by awe !
She danc'd to gladden eyes whose burning glances
Turn thoughts of honest men on flashing swords,
On flame at stains washed out alone by blood !
The empire of her beauty giving prey
To parasites, who love for their own ends,
And by their homage shame !

HERO.

We have talk'd enough.

SIR VALENTINE.

Your pardon ! Yet we have not talk'd at all—
The errand yet untold, that brought me here—
I would have leave to woo thee.

HERO.

Thou ! a man
Of the vain world !

SIR VALENTINE.

Nay, of no world but thine !

HERO.

Thou of my world ! How com'st thou by these gauds—
Lace, ribbons, tinsel, trinkets, slashes—not
To name that most egregious vanity
Thou mountest in thy cap, and the poor bird
It was purloin'd from wore for use, not show !
Rebuke and lesson to its wiser lord !
There's not a portion of thee but bespeaks
Ransacking of the earth and sea—and all
To recommend thee unto eyes, whose owners,
Be they the homeliest, behold thy betters
In their own mirrors.

SIR VALENTINE.

I will dress to please
The eyes of none but thee.

HERO.

Thou should'st be rich—
Too rich for modest happiness, and all
Beyond is but the name ! Riches are bars

Prevent us enter Heaven ; how then be doors
On earth to admit us unto aught of Heaven ?
How many hundreds brings thy rental in ?

SIR VALENTINE.

As many as make up a thousand pounds
To welcome every quarter.

HERO.

Poor young man !
How I do pity thee !

SIR VALENTINE.

I will reduce
My revenue.

HERO.

Can'st thou reduce the wants
Thy revenue hath gender'd—foes to thee
Under the masques of friends ?

SIR VALENTINE.

My every want
Is now summ'd up in one.

HERO.

Hast thou a title ?
How art thou nam'd ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Sir Launcelot de Vere.

HERO.

How would'st thou bear be called plain Launcelot ?
Thou would'st not know thyself. We have no titles.
Names, being of themselves no part of us,
We only value as distinguishing
One from another. Stephen, Ephraim,

John, Obadiah, Solomon, suffice.
 All adjuncts else, as Mist'ers, Sirs, Earls, Dukes,
 We do regard as superfluities.
 Sir Valentine de Grey! I neither like
 Title nor Christian name. More proper far
 Would Peter fit—or Mark, or John, or Luke,
 Or Nicodemus—names of men of peace,
 And sounding passing sweet.

SIR VALENTINE.

The name is mine
 Thou givest me.

HERO.

So thou believest now :
 To-morrow, thou wilt be the former man.
 Nor must I longer talk with thee ; for sweet
 I own the proffer of thy duty comes,
 Altho' by me received mistrustingly.
 Persist not, friend, or I will wholly doubt
 What half I would believe ;—which, if indeed
 Thou mean'st—and, here, the frankness of a maid
 Doth overshoot her coyness—thou can'st prove
 Hath matter weightier than airy words.
 Farewell! What shall I call thee?

SIR VALENTINE.

Launcelot.

HERO.

So soon forgot.

SIR VALENTINE.

Mark, Obadiah, Job,
 Peter, or—or—I lack the other names.

HERO.

No matter ! These are grateful as the rest,
Nor 'mongst them Peter least ! What a sweet name
Is Peter !—I will call thee Peter, tho'
It be for the last time (*sighs*). Farewell, friend Peter.

SIR VALENTINE.

Stay ! How may I call thee ?

HERO.

Say, Ruth.

SIR VALENTINE.

Farewell,
Fair Ruth !

HERO.

Fair Ruth ! So soon forgot again !
Friend Ruth, thou ought'st to say.

SIR VALENTINE.

Friend Ruth, farewell !
And yet another word ! Have I thy leave
To come to thee again ?

HERO.

That must depend
On how thou com'st.

SIR VALENTINE.

Then sure I come again !
Friend Ruth !

HERO.

Friend Peter ?

SIR VALENTINE.

May we not shake hands ?

HERO.

That must depend on how thou shakest hands.

SIR VALENTINE.

Why, how should I shake hands?

HERO.

Why, soberly.

SIR VALENTINE.

Then soberly, friend Ruth, shake hands with me.

HERO.

There, that is long enough!

SIR VALENTINE.

One more word yet—

Friend Ruth, may I not kiss thy hand?

HERO.

Friend Peter!

SIR VALENTINE.

I'll kiss it soberly—yea, soberly.

Farewell—once more—farewell!—One more.—It is
A banquet gathers appetite.

Enter CLEVER.

CLEVER.

Young man,
What do'st thou?

SIR VALENTINE.

Nothing.

CLEVER.

Yea, a thing doth vex
The spirit of the maiden, and to mine
Doth give disturbance—yea, a forward thing,
Abomination to the faithful—yea,
Abomination.—Go! [*Placing himself between them.*]

SIR VALENTINE.

Farewell !

CLEVER.

Avaunt !

Such things become not eyes like her's or mine
To look upon.—Avoid !

SIR VALENTINE.

Farewell ! I'll come
Again.

HERO.

Then come with more discretion, friend.

CLEVER.

Thou hear'st—avoid ! Remove thee hence ! Begone !
Make not a crook, friend, of thy body—say
Farewell—do nothing more—and go !

SIR VALENTINE.

Farewell !

HERO.

Farewell !

END OF ACT III.

SIR VALENTINE.

Why, how should I shake hands?

HERO.

Why, soberly.

SIR VALENTINE.

Then soberly, friend Ruth, shake hands with me.

HERO.

There, that is long enough!

SIR VALENTINE.

One more word yet—

Friend Ruth, may I not kiss thy hand?

HERO.

Friend Peter!

SIR VALENTINE.

I'll kiss it soberly—yea, soberly.

Farewell—once more—farewell!—One more.—It is
A banquet gathers appetite.

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What do'st thou?

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Abomination to the faithful—yea,

Abomination.—Go!

[*Placing himself between them.*]

SIR VALENTINE.

Farewell !

CLEVER.

Avaunt !

Such things become not eyes like her's or mine
To look upon.—Avoid !

SIR VALENTINE.

Farewell ! I'll come
Again.

HERO.

Then come with more discretion, friend.

CLEVER.

Thou hear'st—avoid ! Remove thee hence ! Begone !
Make not a crook, friend, of thy body—say
Farewell—do nothing more—and go !

SIR VALENTINE.

Farewell !

HERO.

Farewell !

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The Park.

Enter LORD ATHUNREE *and* FELTON.

LORD ATHUNREE.

I did appoint him to attend me here.
Behoves my door and he be strangers, lest
Our practices be trac'd. Want dogs him still,
And fits him for my purpose, by the threat
Of her pernicious tooth. Yet there 's a weakness,
I would he had not. He doth love a child ;
Which shews his nature is not callous all ;
Whence do I oft times dread some start of ruth.
But finds he out fair Hero's close retreat,
The meagre knave shall fatten. Soft ! he's here—
Well, have you traced her ?

Enter LEWSON.

LEWSON.

Yes ; she is at Greenwich,
Where I and mine do live and famish.

LORD ATHUNREE.

Fool!

Not to have guess'd as much, and know she hath
A villa there. Resides she by herself?

LEWSON.

She does.

LORD ATHUNREE.

Then is she mine. Can'st thou obtain
Secret admission?

LEWSON.

Easily, my Lord;
Into her very chamber, which doth open
Into a garden.

LORD ATHUNREE.

It must be done to-night.

LEWSON.

Most strangely is she chang'd.

LORD ATHUNREE.

How?

LEWSON.

In her dress,
That's of the fashion of that formal sect,
Which at all worldly modes exception takes.

LORD ATHUNREE.

Indeed! some plot's on foot, and doth concern
Her quarrel with Sir Valentine. To-night,
She gives me lodging. Stay—we must proceed
With such exactitude, the sun and dial
Shall vary soon as we! I'll write it down.

[Writes.

'Sdeath! I must change a word! I'll write it o'er

Again, that thou may'st have no scratch to hang
Excuse for failure on. There. Be observant
To the syllable. Away! Thy greatest hire,
For former service, I will double for thee,
Succeed'st thou but in this.

LEWSON.

Misgive not, Sir;
I ne'er before did fail you. But, so please you,
Some present prompt supply. My children starve!
My wife, to find them half a meal a day,
Hath worn herself to skin and bone, and now
Can drag her limbs no more to forage for them.
Their pressing need relieve, and do with me
Whate'er thou wilt.

LORD ATHUNREE.

There!

LEWSON.

All is noted here,
Behoveth me to heed?

LORD ATHUNREE.

No jot forgot.
I may rely upon thee?

LEWSON.

As on one
Whose life is in thy hands. [Goes out.]

LORD ATHUNREE.

The cards do turn.

FELTON.

I pray you, what intend you?

LORD ATHUNREE.

He obtains
Admittance; I am on the watch, without;

She is alarm'd ; I hear her cry for help ;
And to her rescue naturally come.
I enter how I can, and once within,
Shape as I may the rest—assured of this,
She will accept protection ; giving which,
I cast what colour on the case I will,
Ensuring payment full.

FELTON.

Thou art the prince
Of plotters !

LORD ATHUNREE.

Thou art no less royal there.
So hold we charge of one another's secrets,
Neither is like to break.

Enter EUSTACE *and* WALSINGHAM.

EUSTACE.

Lord Athunree,
I do accuse thee of a murder ! and
Do undertake to justify myself,
At the point of the sword. Hast thou the courage to
Abide the trial, whereunto I now
Demand of thee thou fixest time and place,
For thy defence ? I do repeat the charge
And challenge too—thou art a murderer !
And I demand thou pay the penalty,
Which if I prove defaulter in exacting,
I am content to leaguer my own life.
For the third time, I charge thee with the deed !
Of felony more capital accuse thee
Than ever caitiff on the scaffold paid
The forfeit of ! A murder cowardly !

Unparallel'd ! past human nature savage !
 Wilt thou confront me ? Wilt thou ? Can'st thou ? Dar'st
 thou ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

Doubt'st thou my answer prompt as thy demand ?

EUSTACE.

Give it, and leave not room for question ! Where,
 And when, shall we the mortal issue try ?

LORD ATHUNREE.

To-morrow !—Stay !—that gentleman thy friend ?

EUSTACE.

He is.

LORD ATHUNREE.

He passes then as voucher for thee.
 Yet I'll prevent miscarriage in the thing
 Thy heart so earnestly is bent upon,
 To its deep cost, I fear. There ! time and place
 You see are written down.

[Writes on the back of the paper he had first written upon.]

EUSTACE.

For this I thank you,
 That I may thoroughly be quits with you,
 And all the payment on thy side be due.

LORD ATHUNREE.

Farewell ! Thou art young, but yet more rash than young !

EUSTACE.

I am not rash, but by reflection act
 As I do now, with hope my arm will prove
 Staunch as my tongue. Thou art a murderer !

[LORD ATHUNREE and FELTON go out.]

WALSINGHAM.

My fellow-student! Wonder hitherto
Hath tied my tongue! Has he a wrong with thee
To settle too?

EUSTACE.

He has! Let's see what time and place
He hath appointed? Ha! what's here?
Oh, Providence is here! (*Aside.*) A plot to ensnare,
In helpless ruin like to mine, the heart
In girlhood still was nearest to my own.
Then must I see thee, Hero! Pride must now
Give way to love. Occasion calls me hence,
More urgent yet than that which brought me hither.
Nor must we go together. Question not!
But, at our place of practice, give me meeting
An hour at least ere noon.

WALSINGHAM.

I shall not fail.

[*Goes out.*]

EUSTACE.

Oh, what a case is mine, to wear the brand
I never merited!—to be denounc'd
The child of guilt, that am the daughter free—
Except the primal all-referring lapse—
Of innocence! To be amerc'd of that
The loss of which might make offence a thing
To be commiserated more than blam'd—
For nothing!—So!—Inconstant to him!—So!—
A wanton!—So!—The framer of a lie!—
He loves me still! I pardon all for that!
For that his tongue shall rail at me again—
Pronounce me faithless—liar,—wanton—ought!
Ought that I am not, for the blessed AM

That still assures him mine! Oh, I do play
 A novel part. A solitary maid,
 Herself to vindicate her injur'd name!
 No father, brother, friend, to plead the cause
 Of her wrong'd honour, and her baffled love!
 No champion left her but a woman's arm
 Back'd by a woman's heart!—yet, trusting these,
 And to just Heaven appealing, resolute
 For life or death to meet the mortal strife!—
 But where is Hero? Does thy friend forget thee,
 And thou in peril? No! She flies to save thee!

[Goes out.]

SCENE II.

A Room in HERO'S House at Greenwich.

Enter HERO.

HERO.

My game the more I play successfully,
 The less my eagerness to win it grows.
 'Tis all but mine, and thought of victory
 Sits at my heart so heavy, for defeat
 To turn up now were respite to me! respite!
 False gains are poor possessions, bringing not
 Content—the touchstone of true happiness!
 And yet I punish him! For what? for right?
 Retaliation of offended wrong!
 Yet did he bear me beyond patience hard.
 At once to throw off duty! and my slave

To start up my dictator, that ne'er yet
 Met bended brow of man—in presence too
 Where vassal homage had awaited me !
 He should be made to bow ! and, once become
 My thorough captive, spurns for spurning take !
 Yet doth he raise him, by those lofty thoughts
 He breathes of zeal and honor for my sex,
 While I do sink as coming short thereof !
 With this regard I fail. I must see nought
 Except my purpose—by the dread of loss
 Yet to enhance my value in his eyes,
 Propound my terms, and to the issue come
 That shews him foil'd, and me the conqueror !

Enter CLEVER.

CLEVER.

Ma'am, he is come !

HERO.

Then shew him in, and mind
 What we arrang'd, touching those friends of mine
 I am to summon from the other Room. [CLEVER goes out.
 How shall I struggle thro' the race, wherein
 I gasp at setting out !

Enter CLEVER, shewing in SIR VALENTINE.

CLEVER.

Here is the man
 That wants to speak with thee—be careful, for
 I like his habit better than his looks.
 He minds me of some child of Satan, who
 My spirit hath offended—watch him, Ruth,
 And advertise me if he troubleth thee.

[Goes out.

HERO.

Thy business, friend ?

SIR VALENTINE.

Dost thou not know it ?

HERO.

Yea !

If fits thy purpose, friend, thy habit, grave,
And goodly must it be—what is its shape?
Instruction or admonishment, or what ?
Unfold thee. Be it righteous and discreet,
I'll hear it as an humble sister ought.

SIR VALENTINE.

Dost thou not know me ?

HERO.

Yea ! that thou art one
Amongst the faithful—but I know not who
That one may be.

SIR VALENTINE.

Not know me, sister Ruth ?

HERO.

Oh ! is it you, friend Peter, come again
Into a new man chang'd !

SIR VALENTINE.

So chang'd for thee !
My fortune I've reduced. Made o'er to thee
For purposes of heavenly charity !

HERO.

Made o'er thy fortune ? Could I this believe ? [*Aside.*

SIR VALENTINE.

My thousands, lady, have since yesterday

To hundreds dwindled, at thy will. If that
 Contents thee not, but still I seem too rich,
 Say but the word, the hundreds shrink to tens—
 The tens to units—these again to nought,
 That my fond love may win most rich reward.

HERO.

I dream'd not of such love !

[*Aside*

SIR VALENTINE.

My title gone.

HERO.

Thy title gone !

SIR VALENTINE.

Had it been costlier,
 More readily it had been thrown away,
 As to thy wish, whereto it gave offence,
 A meeter sacrifice ! Plain gentleman
 Is all they rate me now ; if that's too high,
 I'll be plain yeoman, for thy gentle sake ;
 If that, low hind ! aught lady, aught ! to please
 The wise desires are guardians to thy love !

HERO.

His title likewise gone ! I have o'ershot
 My mark ! I'll stop !—Too late—I must go on !—
 Thy work not yet complete. Our sect, thou know'st,
 Prohibits marriage, save amongst its own ;
 To number thee with whom if thou inclin'st
 To recommend thee, it behoves thee win
 Some brother's, sister's, word—such are at hand—
 Wilt thou submit thee to their scrutiny ?

SIR VALENTINE.

At once.

HERO.

But mind, whate'er they do remark,
Thou tak'st in silence—even in good part.
It will be scandal to me else, because
Of entertaining thee.

SIR VALENTINE.

Thy bidding, law.

[HERO rings.]

Enter CLEVER.

CLEVER.

Hath he misdone? Am I to put him forth?

HERO.

No; brother Ephraim I wish to see,
And with him sister Grace.

CLEVER.

They saw the man
Ascend the steps, and when he was let in,
They op'd the door themselves, and vanished!
Thereto advis'd by his forbidding looks.
Friend Ruth, he's poison to thee. Yesterday
I lost much grace accompanying him
From London unto Greenwich, so he vex'd
My spirit by the lightness of his gait,
And mortified me, as he drew the eyes
Of flaunting damsels on him! To reform him
Is hopeless, for the more I did admonish,
The more did he offend; till, scandaliz'd
Beyond endurance e'en of my meek spirit,
I wavered between option to stand still
And let him on alone, or run and leave him.
Observe moreover he's a man of wrath,—

Look at him ! He could eat me up—yea, eat me
 Like to a ravening lion a poor lamb !
 Ne'er judged I looks of man—if inwardly
 He does not bite his lips ! Be sure he swears !
 Yea, he blasphemeth !—Get him from thy doors !
 Eject him from them ! Into the highway with him !
 Heed not if night or day—in sun or rain—
 Or lose thy place among the faithful, Ruth !
 Umph !

HERO.

See they do reject thee—yea,
 They do reject thee !

SIR VALENTINE.

Do not thou the same !
 Oh, let me talk to thee in my soul's speech—
 List ! I have stak'd my life on winning thee !
 Not in my own breath, but in thine I live !
 My portion in the sun, the earth, and all
 The affluence from their copartnery
 Deriv'd, I have made o'er to thee, nor now
 Except by thy vouchsafing can enjoy !
 Am I to live or die ? Nay, think before
 Thou speak'st, and those fair thoughts to council call,
 Yet richer than the sumptuous palace which
 They make their proud sojourn ! So like to Heaven,
 Hast not its ruth that makes us daily bless
 Its governance ? Thou hast ! and as thou hast,
 Let it beam down its influence on me,
 And save thy worshipper ! Thou let'st me kneel—
 Sure then—O ! sure I do not kneel in vain.

HERO.

Rise up ! These proofs of honest passion quite
 Confound me.

SIR VALENTINE.

Hear me! O, the world! the world,
That's made up of two hearts! That is the sun
It moves around! There is the verdure! There
The flower! the fruit! The spring and autumn field,
Which in the reaping grows! the mine that, work'd,
Accumulates in riches—ever free
From influences of the changing stars,
Or aught, save that which sits above them higher
Than they above the globe!—Come! make with me
E'en such a heavenly world.

HERO.

Beseech thee, rise!

SIR VALENTINE.

In hope?

HERO.

In hope! What did I say?

SIR VALENTINE.

Thou said'st—

Thou bad'st me rise in hope (*Rises*). Thy heart is mov'd.

HERO.

'Tis touch'd.

SIR VALENTINE.

And nothing more?

HERO.

Perhaps a little.

SIR VALENTINE.

How may I call that little? what's its name—
If haply of the kind I'd have it be,
'Gainst all I've thrown away, and ten times more,
I'd set it—Lady, tell me, what's its name?

Oh, deal magnanimously with me, nor
What 'tis not wrong to feel, when thou dost feel it,
Believe 'tis wrong to speak! Frankly! could'st love me?

HERO.

Frankly, I could.

SIR VALENTINE.

Once more, be frank—and dost thou?

HERO.

Frankly, I do.

SIR VALENTINE.

I said, "once more be frank,"—
Yet must I say once more be frank again.

HERO.

And if thou dost, I will be frank again.

SIR VALENTINE.

Wilt take me for thy husband?

HERO.

There's my hand—
If no impediment forbids thee, clasp it.

SIR VALENTINE.

None.

HERO.

Soft—I'll do 't! 'Twill be a sweet revenge! [*Aside.*
A thought doth strike me. Thou hast lov'd a damsel,
My likeness it should seem—and one know I,
Who to the vision so resembles me,
As doth myself, myself; nor can the ear
That hears us, well determine which is which,
In pitch and tone our voices so are one.
The damsel thou affectedst, may be she—
Her name is Hero Sutton.

SIR VALENTINE.

'Tis the same.

HERO.

Another thought doth strike me. Is the name
Thou gav'st to me, thy real one? Alas!
Thy colour mounteth! It is clear! Thou art
Sir Valentine de Grey? Alas! alas!
Your leave to be alone.

SIR VALENTINE.

Are you not well?

HERO.

Oh, yes; I'm very well. Good e'en! Quite well!
Well as a woman can be when she finds,
Too late, she rashly gave her heart away,
To one, whose value for the gift will be,
Soon as he proves 'tis his, to bid her keep it.

SIR VALENTINE.

To bid her keep it!

HERO.

As Hero Sutton rues!

SIR VALENTINE.

She never gave
Her heart to me.

HERO.

She did! you know not when
A woman gives away her heart! at times
She knows it not herself. Insensibly
It goes from her! She thinks she hath it still—
If she reflects—while smoothly runs the course
Of wooing; but if haply comes a check—
An irrecoverable—final one—
Aghast—forlorn—she stands, to find it lost,
And with it, all the world!

SIR VALENTINE.

No maid could love,
And act as she.

HERO.

How did she act ?

SIR VALENTINE.

I told thee.
She danc'd to please a libertine, and pain
A man of honour, who did worship her.

HERO.

She danc'd to please no man but thee. Your eyes,
She thought upon her, did alone inspire her
In the measure. Thorough conquest of the heart,
She thought was all but her's, she hop'd to make ;
And so, with all her soul endeavouring,
Did lose it all, and with it all herself !

SIR VALENTINE.

If she had told me this—

HERO.

If she had told !
When ? pray thee, where ? or how ?—did'st name a place,
Or time, to hear her vindicate herself ?
Did'st even hint it to her ? In a breath,
You doubted, tried, condemn'd, and sentenc'd ; nor
'Fore witnesses did'st pity her to spare her !
They should beware, who charges lay in love,
On solid grounds they make them ! for, there are hearts
So proudly fond, that, wrong them here, they'll break
Or ever they will stoop to right themselves.
Much such a one is her's ; and yet, with all
Her pride—for strong as that, more strong her love—
She trusts to win thee still.

SIR VALENTINE.

She gave me up, without a sigh or word.

HERO.

So had I given thee up, had I been she—
And I do love thee.

SIR VALENTINE.

See me at thy feet.

HERO.

I can't, with thought how thou hast knelt at her's.

SIR VALENTINE.

Nay, hear me, but in pity.

HERO.

She in pity
Did hear thee ! Much it profited her !—much !
She now, it seems, may sue !

SIR VALENTINE.

I swear to thee
Eternal constancy !

HERO.

Thy witnesses, thy oaths to her !

SIR VALENTINE.

Where are the smiles just now
Did beam upon me ?

HERO.

Quenched by Hero's tears.

SIR VALENTINE.

By Hero's tears ! She never wept for me !

HERO.

She show'd thee not her tears ; but what of that ?
Her eyes might pour, and thou not see a drop.
I know they did so.

SIR VALENTINE.

Let me hold thy hand.

HERO.

Never, till her, thou hast wrong'd, thou offerest
To right. The world return to, thou would'st quit
It seems for me. Resume its habit ; hie
To Hero Sutton's, whom I will advise
To look for thee to-morrow eve. Repeat
What I have said to thee. If she denies
What I aver, be free to come to me,
And welcome too ! If she acknowledges,
The hand of her, whose heart thou hast purloin'd,
Behoves thee ask and take.

SIR VALENTINE.

Yet hear me.

HERO.

Nay !
These are the terms on which we break or meet.

SIR VALENTINE.

If she rejects me ?

HERO.

Then will Ruth be thine.

SIR VALENTINE.

If she accepts me ?

HERO.

Then still thine—She dies !

[*They go out severally.*]

SCENE III.

An Ante-Room leading into HERO'S Chamber in the same House.

Enter LEWSON, from the Window.

LEWSON.

Safe! Safe!—all silent! What has turn'd my feet
 From flesh to lead? My body, which to bear
 Their function is, doth seem to drag them on.
 I wont not thus to feel. Ferrying across
 From Limehouse now, I sav'd a drowning man.
 Twice had he sunk in sight of his young brood,
 That with their dam kept fluttering on the shore.
 How they did bless me! while the standers by
 Did echo them, and to inquirers say,
 That ask'd who sav'd him, "Yonder 's the good man!"
 And I afoot to do an evil act!
 Another should have sav'd him! Let it pass!
 Is this her chamber? No, her dressing-room.
 Ay, here 's her woman's gear. What holds this case?
 Her paint, I'll warrant—her cosmetics—aught
 To give another skin; they're ne'er content
 With nature's; patches, perfumes, dentifrice!
 A book?—I'll wager one she durst not show!
 A Bible! Umph! Strange reading that, methinks,
 For a fine lady. Here's a leaf turn'd down;
 What says the place? It seems to talk to me!
 I'll read no further! So—what have we here?
 Her letters! Excellent! Her letters!—now
 To see how they can look and talk the saint,

And play the sinner still. A hundred pounds,
 The first is an amour!—A wretch's prayer
 For help—herself and children without food
 For two whole days! What, baggage! beg ere rob?
 Wait for a thaw, and see thy little ones
 Congeal to death i' the icy world!—with the thought
 I have a feeling how the tiger's fangs
 Rend for her cubs a meal!—What alms did'st hope
 Her ladyship would give?—What would suffice
 The dressing of her gown she wears a night
 And casts aside for foul! What's here—is this
 Her answer—or the copy on't? Indeed?
 Ay, when she gives she gives! She seems to think
 That poverty, like plenty, is made up
 Of flesh and blood. There's food for dam and whelps
 For a whole week. The letter's to my wife!
 She din'd to-day—fall to 't—fall to 't—thy brood
 May gorge them now! Methinks I see them feed!
 Heaven bless her!—What! Heaven bless her, did I say?
 Then, what do I do here? No more of this.
 I've work to do, chimes not with thoughts like these.
 No more on't. Footsteps!—so—beast to thy lair.

[*Conceals himself.*]

Enter HERO; she goes to the window, and looks out.

HERO.

Whether mine eye with a new spirit sees,
 Or nature is grown lovelier, I know not;
 But ne'er, methinks, was sunset half so sweet!
 He's down, and yet his glory still appears,
 Like to the memory of a well-spent life,
 That's golden to the last, and when 'tis o'er,
 Shines in the witnesses it leaves behind.

They say, a ruddy sunset a fair day !
 Oh ! may it be a day without a cloud,
 Which of my fate doth see the clearing up ;
 That I may quote it ever as a sign
 Of sincere fortune, often as I say
 Was ever day so bright ! How calm is all—
 How calm am I !—Would every breast I knew
 Did lodge a heart as tranquil.—There was one—
 A most strange history ! Is she alive,
 Or dead ? (EUSTACE *appears at the window.*) Who's there ?

EUSTACE (*entering*).

A friend !

HERO.

Help !

EUSTACE.

Hush ! I come
 For safety !

HERO.

To thyself ?

EUSTACE.

To thee. Look here,—
 Lest I should miss thee, I prepar'd this scroll.
 More brief 'twill tell my errand, than my tongue
 Could do't.

HERO (*reads*).

Lord Athunree !—This very night !
 My house beset—myself by force abstracted !

EUSTACE.

If thou hast kindred in the neighbourhood,
 Or friend thou can'st rely upon, forthwith
 Of thy immediate danger caution them
 By hands you can confide in—for my pains,
 I pray you pay me with the only audience
 Of some poor moments, when I'll take my leave.

HERO (*to herself*).

I need not fear him ! On his o'ercast brow
'Tis grief, not guilt, that lowers.—A minute's patience,
I shall rejoin you. [*Goes out.*

EUSTACE.

Thou art happy, Hero,
And she that loves thee, weeps—but not that thou
Art happy. Thy fair fortune is the likeness
Of what was once my own ! It is a face
Reminds me of a valued friend that's gone,
And which I bless, the while it makes me weep !

HERO (*re-entering*).

What you advis'd, I've done—and now your pleasure ?

EUSTACE.

Have I your leave, I'll sit. I've used some haste—
Am somewhat out of breath—I thank you ! So !
Pray you be seated, too. You've had your share
Of friends ?—Your 'haviour of the winning kind,
That goodness sweetens !—you are frank—you love
Another's weal more than you envy it—
And such a one makes friends.—'Mongst those you've found
You surely some do miss, else was your fate
Past earthly blessing happy ?

HERO.

I've lost friends.

EUSTACE.

By—death ?

HERO.

By death.

EUSTACE.

And any by misfortune ?

HERO.

Misfortune !—No, not any.

EUSTACE (*rising*).

What!—not one?

Good night!

HERO.

What mean you? Do you take me for
 A season friend, no stauncher than the bird
 The sun doth tell his time to come and go,
 And's with us when 'tis summer?—O, you wrong me!
 What!—I to love, as doth that summer bird
 The land he makes his gay sojourning in,
 My friend, because 'tis leaf and blossom time!
 Indeed you wrong me!—Knew I at this moment
 A cheek I lov'd, was beggar'd of its smiles—
 Not one left to it—I swear to thee the next—
 If back'd my power my will—before the next,
 My own should be its neighbour.—Oh! how much
 You wrong me!

EUSTACE.

Glad I am I've done thee wrong—
 In sooth, I am—and yet I wrong'd thee not,
 I only miss'd thy meaning! Had'st not a friend
 Misfortune lost thee?—not that thou shunn'dst her,
 But that her heavy and most strange affliction
 To thee and all her sex forbad her access?

HERO.

A friend? a sister! What a fate was her's!
 Of all I valued, she the being was
 I least could measure worth with. Of all grace,
 The pattern was she—person, features, mind,
 Heart, every thing, as nature had essay'd
 To frame a work which none might find a flaw in!
 And yet 'tis said, she fell—and if she did,
 Let none be sure they'll stand! She couldn't fall!

'There's such a thing as purity on earth,
 And if she fell, there could be no such thing !
 She didn't fall !—no ! no !—I knew her, or
 I never knew myself ! Virtue with her
 Was not a lesson we must con before
 'Tis learn'd by heart ; it was a portion of her,
 Much as her stature, feature, limb or shape,
 Which, saving nature's, hand did never give.
 She has been outrag'd, slandered—aught—but lost !
 She could not fall—she did not—could not fall !
 What ails thee ?

EUSTACE.

He that sets a banquet down
 To famish'd lips, serves poison and not meat,
 For, ten to one, the greedy guest doth die.
 Yet doth he bless the host, as I bless thee,
 That spread'st for me this feast !

HERO.

This feast ! What feast ?
 Move not thy lips thus impotently, or
 I'll think thou diest indeed ! What feast do'st mean ?
 Is't one the heart makes ? 'Tis—thine eyes do talk
 Language 'twould tax a hundred tongues to speak !
 In wonder's name, who art thou ? Say thou'rt not
 What thou dost seem, I'll thee tell who thou art !
 Could I not do't ?—Could I not ?—Helen ?—What ?
 Well ? Am I right ? If ever thou did'st lodge
 A treasure in this breast, ne'er fear to claim it !
 'Tis safe—whole—whole—demand it—take it—come—
 'Tis thine as e'er it was !—Well ?

EUSTACE (*speaking as HELEN*).

Hero !

HERO.

Nay,
 I'll bring it to thee, then! That's right—weep on!
 My sweet! my dear! my poor! my wrong'd one—yes,
 Wrong'd—wrong'd—I say't again! Thou need'st not speak,
 Thou hast not strength—thou'lt sleep with me to-night?—
 To-morrow for thy story.

HELEN.

Nay, to-night.
 I'm more myself again!—Let it be so—
 Sit down awhile. How hast thou been, my Hero?

HERO.

Well, sweet, most well.

HELEN.

Now by the love
 Thou bear'st me, interrupt me not, but hear
 My story out. Thou hast been told, that from
 A roof which shelters aught but innocence,
 In company with one, whom innocence
 That would be safe should shun, i' the face of day,
 Thy friend was seen to issue. Thither by
 A forged tale of misery alone
 She was decoyed—exposed to outrage there—
 Rescued by him—by him conducted thence,
 Met in the street ere well her foot had left
 The threshold—countenance refused her tale
 By him that sole could vouch its truth—by *him*
 Her tale discredited, whose credence was
 Life! happiness! all but honour! In a word,
 Her virtue blasted, that had ne'er known blight—
 Denounced as canker'd—rotten—that was sound
 As thy own, Hero—ay, as thy own!

HERO.

I know't.

HELEN.

You know't? Alas, you know it not—you think it—
Think it in the teeth of damning fact. It is
Your love—your charity. An alms—an alms—
Is all that friend so kind as even thou,
Can render now to me—yet, I'll be righted!
But fare-thee-well—'tis late!

HERO.

You'll stay with me?

HELEN.

What! let me press thy pure sheets, Hero, with
A tainted name? How I have wrong'd thee!—wouldst
Believe't? I once came to thy door—but there
I stopp'd. I was not wont to ask for leave
To enter it, and I must ask for't now!
I left thy door again—the certainty
To see it never ope' thy friend preferr'd
To but the chance to see it shut upon her.

HERO.

To but the chance to see it shut upon thee!
What warrant ever gave I for such chance?
Oh! had it wider, free'r ope'd than e'er,
It only had anticipated what
Its mistress' arms had done—what now they do!
You shall not leave—nay, in sooth you shall not!

HELEN.

In this attire, think, should I here be seen—

HERO.

I'll think of nought, but that thou here art now,
But that thou here shalt stay. Thou canst be gone
At dawn. Thou know'st a thousand things I have

To ask of thee—how we shall meet again—
 Where I shall find thee—what thy projects are—
 Deny me not, I pray thee! 'Twill but make
 The greater beggar of me—Come! you can,
 You must—you will—this is my chamber—come!

[*They go out.*

LEWSON. (*Entering in disorder.*)

I cannot do't! Heaven's on the watch against it!
 'Tis said it guards the good, and if it does,
 Its spirits sure are here—they are!—or why
 This fearful awe come over me? I feel
 As eyes were on me, that I cannot see—
 Above me lips that speak but are unheard—
 And hands that have a thousand thousand times
 The power of flesh and blood, yet lack the bulk
 Of air! Heaven will not have it be—it sets
 Before mine eyes, the fruit of what I've done—
 To warn me back from what I've come to do.
 That hapless maiden owes her injur'd name
 To me! I was the instrument to ruin her!
 To fix on her the wanton's brand, that ne'er
 In thought it seems did know the wanton's stain.
 To damn in this world, what i' the next is blest!
 Oh! heavy sin—Go, sin no more! How's this?
 Go, sin no more! So said the book to me.
 Then Heaven doth care for sinners, it should seem!
 A blessed book! I'll go and sin no more!
 The chime! It lacks a quarter of an hour,
 The very clock doth watch me. Was't the hour,
 They'd have me in their fearful toils again!
 Away! away! speed feet, while ye are free,
 Softly and swift—the minutes fly! away!

[*Exit.*

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

HERO'S *Town House.*

Enter SIR WILLIAM SUTTON *and* EMILY.

SIR WILLIAM.

What? Helen Mowbray come to life again?

EMILY.

'Tis even so; and metamorphos'd as
You ne'er would dream. But pray you, use despatch.
On the reverse of this she gave your niece,
And which unthinkingly no doubt was given
To her, 'tis clear some mortal work 's on hand—
For here are time, and place, and weapon nam'd,
Upon the part of base Lord Athunree.
There yet is time! Prevent it, while you may!

SIR WILLIAM (*rings the bell*).

Hark, Sir! Take charge of this, and have it straight
Put into execution by the chief
O' the city officers—look to it well!
And now, what means this full assembly call'd
Of friends and relatives, to feast with Hero?

EMILY.

I must not tell—but guess.

SIR WILLIAM.

I cannot guess
The shapes particular of women's fancies,
Especially in one of Hero's vein.
Retains she her disguise?

EMILY.

No; casts it off—
And with it, habit more a part of her.
She is chang'd beyond belief.

SIR WILLIAM.

Not my belief,
When I do see it.

EMILY.

I must hie to her,
And set her mind at rest on this affair,
Touching her friend, which chance reveal'd to her,
In time, I trust, the issue to prevent.
You have given order they be hither brought?

SIR WILLIAM.

I have. Where's Hero?

EMILY.

In the library,
In earnest converse still with that strange man,
Who prayed an audience with her, and, I think,
Brought news that has surpris'd her. Dinner time
Will see an end, and clearing up of all.

[*They go out severally.*]

SCENE II.

The outskirts of LONDON.

Enter WALSINGHAM and HELEN (still in the disguise of EUSTACE.)

WALSINGHAM.

Not yet arriv'd !

HELEN.

'Tis 'fore the time.

WALSINGHAM.

How feel you ?

HELEN.

Collected, and myself.

WALSINGHAM.

You look so. Clear
Your 'haviour, as this day of trial only
The ordinary mate of yesterday,
You'll win !

HELEN.

I shall !—I am resolv'd to win.

WALSINGHAM.

Shew me thy sword.

HELEN.

I cannot draw it, but
My life must follow.

WALSINGHAM.

How ?

HELEN.

It is my heart—
This which I wear, is nothing. Call it steel,

'Tis steel!—a straw, it even is a straw!
 Its stamina not lodging in itself,
 But in the use that's made on't.

WALSINGHAM.

This is calm,
 Upon the eve of combat.

HELEN.

Walsingham,
 There is a kind of nature that clears up
 The instant it confronts a trying thing.
 In common evils, hesitates and fears;
 In ills of moment, shows sedate resolve.

WALSINGHAM.

Why, that is woman's proper contradiction.

HELEN.

It passes for 't; but sometimes 'bides in man,
 Not therein less of his high caste deserving,
 Tho' so resembling woman! Think'st not so?

WALSINGHAM.

Assuredly.

HELEN.

You see this mood is mine,
 Nor was I on my guard to let it out—
 'Twill lose me credit with you. Best have pass'd
 For Sir Redoubtable any day o' the year!
 You more had thought of me.

WALSINGHAM.

No!

HELEN.

You say I am calm?
 I am so—that is, as to the issue of
 This mortal meeting—for 'tis mortal!—but
 I have a trouble, and—wilt thou believe me?

'Tis touching thee!—It grieves me, Walsingham,
To leave thee an abused man behind me!

What thou didst tell me I have ponder'd well,
And thereon founded arguments, methinks,
More solid than I urg'd on you before.

They are here—your poor friend's legacy to you!

[*Gives a paper.*

Stop!—you're about to speak—don't speak as yet.

If I should fall, you pledge your gentle word,
My body you will have direct convey'd

Unto the lady's I have herein nam'd,

[*Gives another paper.*

Deliver'd to her custody—her own?

Nor until then, one fast'ning, fold, loop, thread

O' the vesture, thou wilt suffer be disturb'd—

No, not to search, or probe, or staunch a wound,

Or settle if indeed alive or dead,

Or any thing! To this, thou pledgest thee?

WALSINGHAM.

Dear boy, I do!

HELEN.

Another thing—

WALSINGHAM.

What is 't?

Thou pausest, as in doubt I'll grant it thee.

Whate'er it be, I'll swear to do it.

HELEN.

Ha!

Then thou dost set my heart indeed at rest!

Mind, thou hast sworn to do 't. Revenge me not!

That comprehendeth all! Don't speak again,

Till I have done, quite done. Thou lovest me?

WALSINGHAM.

I do.

I find I could not live without thee ; so
 Guarding thy life, I but protect my own.
 That's fair—that's rational—that's sound in nature !
 Want'st further reason ?—I will give it thee—
 Thou art like her !

HELEN.

Whom ?

WALSINGHAM.

Boy, hast thou read my soul—
 Have I turn'd o'er its every page to thee—
 Love, hate, hope, doubt, possession, loss, bliss, pain,
 Contentment, and despair—and in each one
 Shown thee one all-pervading cause enwrit,
 For nothing? Whom could I compare thee to,
 But her—the heroine of my sad story ?
 Whom much thou dost resemble ! Hast thou never
 Remark'd me gazing in abstraction on thee,
 As tho', upon perusal of thy face,
 While seem'd mine eye intent, my soul did pore
 Upon some other thing?—I have done it oft—
 Will do it once again ! Your eyes are her's,
 In form and hue, but sunk ; a darkness too,
 Not heavy, yet enough to make a cloud,
 Sits—not disparagingly tho'—'neath thine ;
 Her's were two starry brilliants, set in pearl !
 The outline of the nose is quite the same,
 But that of thine is sharper—'tis thy sex.
 The mouth is very like—oh, very like !
 But there's a touch—a somewhat deep one too—
 Of pensiveness. The cast of her's was sweetness,
 Enlocking full content. The cheek is not
 At all alike !—'tis high ; and lauk below ;
 And sallow—not a dimple in't—all contrast

To the rich flower'd and velvet lawn of her's.
 But tho' thou art not she entire—thou art
 Enough of her, to make me love thee, boy !
 With such a brother-love, as brother never,
 I dare be bound, for brother felt before !
 I spoke not of thy hair—it is a wood
 Run wild compar'd to her's, and thrice as deep
 I' the shade—Yet, you are very like her !—quite
 Enough, to make me pour my heart's blood out,
 As water, for thy sake !—They are at hand !

HELEN.

Then let me be at least thy sword-bearer ;
 And when thou need'st the steel, I'll keep the sheath
 Which in thy motions would embarrass thee.

WALSINGHAM.

Take it, and thank thee !

Enter LORD ATHUNREE *and* FELTON.

LORD ATHUNREE.

We are late for you, Sirs ;
 But not, I think, for time.

WALSINGHAM.

You are in time.

HELEN.

Draw off, till, with his second, I arrange
 Preliminaries—which I know are wont,
 In questions of this kind. What we decide,
 I will possess you of ; and then proceed.
 Sir, let us speak. You know me, principal.
 My place, my second would perforce usurp.
 Permit him not, as you're a gentleman !
 You see he is unarm'd—your rapier draw,
 When I draw this, and force him stand aloof.
 You promise this ?

FELTON.

I do ! (*Aside.*) It keeps the odds
Upon our side !

HELEN (*drawing*).

Lord Athunree, I am ready !

FELTON (*drawing, and opposing WALSINGHAM*).

Stand back, Sir ! at your peril !

WALSINGHAM.

Ha !—the boy
Has baffled, and out-witted me !

[*Advances.*

FELTON.

Stand back !
I bar all interruption to the game
We are summon'd here to play.

WALSINGHAM.

A coward act,
To draw upon a naked man !

FELTON.

My lord !
Why draw you not, and he his weapon out ?
Proceed, my lord, at once.

LORD ATHUNREE.

Before I do,
I ask, and I must learn, in name of whom
The urchin has arraign'd, and challeng'd me.
I fight not, till I know upon what cause.

HELEN.

The cause of Helen Mowbray !

WALSINGHAM.

Drop your hand,
And let me pass !—or sure as that's a sword,
My heart is on your point !

LORD ATHUNREE.

Spite of thyself,
Another minute grant I thee to live.
I will not draw, until I know thy name.

HELEN.

Mowbray !

LORD ATHUNREE.

Her brother ?

HELEN.

Any thing you please,
Caitiff without a parallel in crime !

WALSINGHAM.

A brother !—Hold ! Lord Athunree ! Look, Sir,
A moment give I thee, to take thy choice
'Twixt murdering me, or suffering to pass !
Heaven ! do I care for life !

[Rushes upon FELTON, and wrests the sword from him. At the same moment, Officers and Servants enter.]

FIRST OFFICER.

Hold ! Stop !—Proceed
At your peril ! you are all our prisoners, Sirs ;
Sir William Sutton's warrant makes you so,
Which here I show to you. Surrender, then,
And to his niece's bear us company.

[They all go out. WALSINGHAM and HELEN last, who stop a little behind the rest.]

WALSINGHAM.

Thou half hast kill'd me, boy ! How could'st thou do so !
Or keep from one, who lov'd thee as I do,
A secret like to this ? Her brother—so !
Her brother !—I shall love thee better still—
And better yet—and yet not half so well !

[They follow.]

SCENE III.

*The Street.**Enter* SIR VALENTINE.

SIR VALENTINE.

Spite of my failing heart, thus far I've come
 With love to urge me, love to waive me back.
 My duty tender'd, fortune made or lost—
 Not tender'd, absolutely lost—no chance
 Permitted me to win! 'Tis Hero's form
 With the fair essence—match for thing so fair—
 To Hero's form without! It is a whole,
 Past calculation rich, against a part,
 And that the poorest—yet consummate rich.
 And I must play for both, or neither win!
 Or winning one, the other quite forego!
 It cannot be she loves me! Hero love me!
 A prideful pleasure kindles at the thought—
 But comes the gentle Ruth, and puts it out
 With genial brightness of bland nature, as
 The sun a little fire. O sun most fair,
 I richer were ne'er to have known thy light
 Than knowing it to lose it. Ne'er did man
 Draw lots with chances more oppos'd than mine.
 A little moment I am made or lost,
 Lost past retrieving—past addition made!
 Then must I, like a desperate gamester, on!
 Throw fear of loss aside—tho' loss of all—
 And think of nothing but the chance of gain
 That makes me rich for life!—past affluence!

[*Goes out.*]

SCENE LAST.

A Room in HERO'S House.

SIR WILLIAM SUTTON *seated in the centre*—WALSINGHAM,
HELEN, LORD ATHUNREE, FELTON, OFFICERS, &c.

SIR WILLIAM.

Lord Athunree, charg'd with intent thou stand'st
To break the peace of our right sovereign lord
The king. What answer'st thou, or dost refuse
To plead?—Is this thy hand?—Wilt answer that?
Whose'er it is, it is a villain's, lord!
For the same writer that arrang'd a fray
Did plan a felony—in danger put
A lady's jewelry, so rich to her—
Not all the caskets of the proudest line
Of noble dames, pour'd out into one heap,
Could make a blaze to match it!

LORD ATHUNREE (*aside*).

Curse my haste
For such remissness, on the back to write
Of the instructions first I pencill'd down
To give the caitiff wretch—whose guess'd miscarriage
Is now accounted for!

SIR WILLIAM.

Lord Athunree,
How say you?

LORD ATHUNREE.

For the combat you have marr'd,
My silence or denial naught avails.

You found me in the act. The challenger
You need to seek elsewhere.—I am not he.

WALSINGHAM.

Sir William, he says right.—He challeng'd not,
But he such provocation gave, as makes
The challenger more the challeng'd.—He did stain
A lady's credit, bringing it to naught,
Or causing it to pass for nothing more;
Which tresspass capital her brother here,
In form a stripling, but in mind a man,
Indeed demanded reparation for,
Which to exact, my arm assay'd, but fail'd—
For I had woo'd, and won, and, as I thought,
Alone engag'd the maid. Sir William, try,
If from that sacred seat of justice, voice
Of solemn adjuration can avail
To bring the truth to light—first, if the maid
Did fall indeed—the knowledge he thereof
Alone possessing—

SIR WILLIAM.

No, Sir; not alone!—
'The maid did never fall!

WALSINGHAM.

Did never fall?
O, ponder what you say!—Not rashly—O,
Not rashly raise a wretch from the abyss
Into the light, to cast him in again
On darkness heaving darkness! Now I faint
With the day-flood that seems to burst upon me!
I say, “that seems,” for such transition mocks
The doting of belief!—or heard I right?
Or knew'st thou what thou saidst? or, knowing it,
Knew'st thou didst speak on grounds of solid footing,

Something akin to rock?—It should be rock
 Itself, to bear the fabric thou dost raise
 Against the sea of doubts that surges on it!
 O, did she never fall? Did love itself
 Take sides with hate to do her hateful wrong?
 To blast her—to abandon her—and leave
 A prey to haggard fortune—death or madness?

SIR WILLIAM.

Collect thyself, and further audience lend,
 Or bid me hold my tongue. The maiden lives.

WALSINGHAM.

Lives? Lives? Is innocent, perhaps, and loves!
 O does she?

SIR WILLIAM.

Yes.

WALSINGHAM.

Thou seem'st to know what makes
 My all, or naught of being! Innocent,
 And lives and loves?

LORD ATHUNREE.

First prove her innocent.

SIR WILLIAM.

He cannot! what of that?—Another can!

LORD ATHUNREE.

Produce that other.

[SIR WILLIAM *beckons*—LEWSON *enters*.

LEWSON.

Here he is.

LORD ATHUNREE.

Betrayed!

WALSINGHAM.

He hath confess'd—take notice all! The lips
 That blurr'd fair Helen's name hath ope'd themselves,
 To damn themselves, and do the maiden right!

SIR WILLIAM.

No need confession from that riven wretch !
 To that abhorred house thou saw'st her quit,
 A letter, as from one she knew and lov'd,
 In mortal strait entic'd her. There, assailed
 With show of violence from this same man,
 That lord premeditated succour brought her,
 The whole his foul contrivance ! You may leave !
 You are known !—What penalty the law awards
 For such default, be sure shall be exacted !

LORD ATHUNREE.

I do defy you—scorn you ! Do your worst ! *[Goes out.*
[HELEN swooning, is caught by WALSINGHAM.

SIR WILLIAM.

Look to thy mistress, Walsingham.

WALSINGHAM.

Where is she ?—
 I nothing see except this fainting boy,
 Whom help me to restore.

SIR WILLIAM.

To wake him up,
 Breathe in his ear the name thou lovest most !
 Throw back those ebon clusters thoroughly,
 And consciousness will start upon thee straight,
 Thou never dream'dst of, and thou shalt confess
 That love, how'er it hath a jealous eye,
 Hath not a piercing one.

WALSINGHAM.

Herself !—my own !
 My sweet !—my idolis'd !—my innocent
 Helen !—her eye-lids quiver—Helen ! Helen !

They ope! Dost thou not know me, love? O Heaven,
 Die not away again! My soul's true life!
 Helen—my gentle one! My patient one!
 My faithful one, unwarp'd by rudest strain!
 My loving one!—More loving—yes, I say it
 That love thee best—more loving yet than lov'd!
 Look at me! Answer me! This semblance but
 Of death, is death itself to me! 'Tis I—
 'Tis Walsingham!—'Tis I—repentingly,
 Humbly, imploring thee to speak to him,
 To look upon him—pity him!—forgive him!

HELEN.

I love thee, Walsingham. Have all thou ask'st
 In that one little word!

[*They retire.* SIR VALENTINE *enters.*

SIR WILLIAM.

Sir Valentine!

SIR VALENTINE.

The same, Sir William Sutton.

SIR WILLIAM.

You are welcome.

SIR VALENTINE.

In strait where things like life and death depend,
 Suspense is but the rack—I'll know my fate!
 Sir William Sutton, I am come to crave
 An audience of your niece.

SIR WILLIAM.

Apprise my niece
 Sir Valentine de Grey would speak with her.

SIR VALENTINE.

At thought of sight of that proud form again,

Old motions in me stir—but only stir.
Come other thoughts—they are at once at rest!

[HERO enters, most magnificently attired.]

O what a tower of grace and loveliness,
And stateliness, and absolute command,
She bursts upon mine eyes! Were't tenanted
As I would have it!

HERO.

Well, Sir Valentine!
Your will?

SIR VALENTINE.

I come a promise to redeem,
Thou'lt think most strange, as I do, that did make it.
A suit I have, the gain or loss of which
Depends on thee, although to thee not pleaded!
Shall I be pardon'd, who, against my will,
Past sufferance presume?

HERO.

Not mine! Say on.

SIR VALENTINE.

It is the voice of Ruth! I wonder not
At that—but breathing Ruth's benignity!

HERO.

Shall I *entreat* thee say thy wish?

SIR VALENTINE.

More bland
The accents yet! Can Ruth have told me right,
And does she love me?

HERO.

It doth pain me, Sir,
To mark such hesitation, when, to have,

You only have to ask ; and, asking, do
A pleasure—giving leave to pleasure you.

SIR VALENTINE (*aside*).

No strain hath love, if this of other mood.
I win her, and am lost ! O gain to lose !

SIR WILLIAM.

My niece awaits your question.

HERO.

Uncle, peace.
Give him his time—the measure on't his will !
To look for pleasure is itself a pleasure.
But half they feast who to a feast sit down
The moment it is named. Say, that he wait
An hour, why then, so much I banquet more,
And yet fall to with relish.

SIR VALENTINE.

O such words
To fall from Hero's lips a month before !
Come certainty, whate'er along with it !
Dost thou affect me ?

HERO.

Yes, Sir Valentine.

SIR VALENTINE.

Wilt take me for thy husband ?

HERO.

Yes, again.

SIR VALENTINE.

Good bye, sweet Ruth !

HERO.

Strange welcome this !

SIR VALENTINE.

Good bye
To sweet content of modest happiness !
Lady, my title's gone !

HERO.

For that receive
More hearty welcome than thou gav'st to me.

SIR VALENTINE.

My fortune dwindled.

HERO.

As it sinks you rise.
For that receive more hearty welcome yet.

SIR VALENTINE.

My tastes are altered.

HERO.

Tell me what their kind,
They shall be mine—whate'er thy taste, rank, state,
My state, my rank, my tastes, shall be the same !

SIR VALENTINE.

Then must we wed.—O for that plumed tiar,
The simple hood !—that costly lace, the coif
Close pinn'd and modest clear !—that gorgeous dress,
The gown embroider'd with humility !

HERO.

They are donn'd at thy command, and these cast off.

SIR VALENTINE.

And canst thou, too, the vesture of the mind
That made thee cherish these, cast off ?

HERO.

I can !
Hard things which love cannot for love perform.

SIR VALENTINE.

Such bounty should enrich.—Alas ! for me,
Who, spite of all its granting, must be poor.

CLEVER (*entering*).

Friend Ruth, the dinner waits.—Friend Peter here !
And to the world, like thee, gone back again !
Then change of gear for me ! Bold serving man,
Who would be other than his betters are !
No more, friend Obadiah—know me hence
For Master Clever, name and nature one !

SIR VALENTINE.

Have I but dreamt 'tis night, and is it day !
A masque is it I have been acting in,
And known it not ? Can'st thou be both, yet one ?
Is Ruth but Hero—Hero even Ruth ?
Then welcome Hero for the sake of Ruth,
And Ruth more welcome yet for Hero's sake !
And is it so ?—or does the fable end
In cold return to dull reality ?

HERO.

No ; in reality that's born of it
And is its fairer likeness !—real grown
What first was only seeming. I have become
The part, I lately play'd ; the thing I was
Before, have ceas'd to be ! Such virtue hath
The only show of virtue ! For which change
Thy noble nature do I thank, altho'
Perhaps with more than prudent jealousy
Exacting ; and precipitate, where patience
Might well have counsell'd pause. With Hero's form
Take Ruth's contentment and humility—
Their dress, whate'er your love would have it be !

But here is one unchang'd, nor needing change, [*To* HELEN.
 Except where seeming goes for next to naught!
 My Helen! thou art happy now!

HELEN.

I am!

WALSINGHAM.

And I, that scarce deserve my happiness!
 But what shall make me misbeliever hence?
 How could I doubt thee! Strong appearances
 By stronger vouchers back'd, it was, that made me.
 But that detected now—and these explain'd—
 Thy virtue rises like a pyramid
 I wonder aught could hide!—A life of trust
 Shall for a season of misgiving pay thee!
 Yet more I have to say—of that anon—
 For guests are here you thought not of before,
 On whom your feast that waits for us depends—
 Marr'd, if disrelish'd,—made, if they're content!

THE END.

I O N ;

A T R A G E D Y,

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY

THOMAS NOON TALFOURD.

FIRST ACTED AT COVENT GARDEN THEATRE, 26th MAY 1836.



FOURTH EDITION;

TO WHICH ARE ADDED SONNETS.

LONDON :

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NOTICE,

INSTEAD OF DEDICATION.

IN offering this attempt at dramatic composition to the public at large, I am mournfully reminded of an irreparable loss by the necessity of omitting a Dedication to one whose name should have graced its opening page. The two Editions which have been privately circulated were inscribed to my venerable and indulgent friend, DR. VALPY, upon whose long life of kindness Death has since set the final seal. When I ventured to claim for it his protection, I well knew that I might rely upon that charity which lavished its bounties upon every effort of his pupils, for tenderness to its faults, and for generous praise of any merits which the eye of friendship might detect or create. There was also a propriety in seeking this association for a work which was prompted by love of those remains of antique beauty which he had taught me to know and to revere; which assumed that form of poetry in which he had chiefly delighted; and which, although meditated in broken hours, and at long

intervals, had always mingled with the recollections of those happy days, when he first awakened within me the sense of classical grace, and of those after-seasons, when the exquisite representations of Greek Tragedy, which he superintended, made its images vital. He is gone to his rest, full of years and honours; and I cannot receive from him that sanction which he cordially gave me when I presented this Drama to my friends, now that I submit it to the judgment of a wider and an impartial circle. Death, which harmonises the pictures of human character, found little in *his* to spiritualise or to soften; but if it has not enhanced the feeling of his excellences in the minds of those who felt their influence, it has enabled them to express that feeling without the semblance of flattery. It has left them free, not only to expatiate on those well-directed labours which have facilitated the access of the young to the elements of sound learning; on the solemn and persuasive tone of his pulpit eloquence; on the steadiness of his attachment to principles adopted with caution, expressed with moderation, yet maintained without a sigh at the cost of the emoluments and honours to which they were obstacles; but also to revert to that remarkable kindness of disposition which was the secret but active law of his moral being. His nature was not ameliorated, nor even characterised, but wholly moulded of Christian love to a degree of entireness of which there are few examples. He had no sense of injury but as something to be forgiven. The liberal allowance which he extended to all human frailties grew more active when they affected his

own interests, and interfered with his own hopes; so that, however he might reprobate evil at a distance, as soon as it came within his sphere, he desired only to overcome it by good. Envy, Hatred, and Malice, were to him mere names—like the figures of a speech in a schoolboy's theme, or the giants in a fairy tale—phantoms which never touched him with a sense of reality. His guileless simplicity of heart was not preserved in learned seclusion, or by a constant watchfulness over the development of youthful powers, (for he found time to mingle frequently in the blameless gaieties and the stirring business of life,) but by the happy constitution of his own nature, which passion could rarely disturb, and evil had no power to stain. His system of education was animated by a portion of his own spirit: it was framed to enkindle and to quicken the best affections, and to render emulation itself subservient to the generous friendships which it promoted. His charity, in its comprehensiveness, resembled nothing less than the imagination of the greatest of our poets, embracing every thing human; shedding its light upon the just and the unjust; detecting “the soul of goodness in things evil,” and stealing rigidity from virtue; bringing into gentle relief those truths which are of aspect the most benign, and those suggestions and hopes which are most full of consolation; and attaching itself, in all the various departments of life, to individuals whose childhood it had fostered; in whose merits its own images were multiplied; or whose errors and sorrows supplied the materials of its most quick and genial action. The hold

which the Reading-school boy had upon it could not be forfeited, not even “by slights, the worst of injuries;” and when broken in fortune, deserted by relatives, and frowned on by the world, he had only to seek the hospitable roof of his old master—“claim kindred there, and have his claims allow’d.” By the spirit of cordiality which breathed there, all party-differences were melted away, or, if perceived at all, served only to render tolerance more vivid; and when he who had presided there for fifty years left the scene of his generous labours as a permanent abode, it was to diffuse the serenity of a good conscience and the warmth of unchilled affections through the homes of children who were made proud as well as happy by his presence. Such was he to the last, amidst the infirmities which accidents rather than age had accumulated around him;—the gentlest of monitors, and the most considerate of sufferers—until he was withdrawn from those whose minds he had nurtured; one of whom, who has most cause for gratitude, pays this humble tribute to his memory.

T. N. T.

London, 26th May, 1836.

P R E F A C E

TO THE FOURTH PUBLISHED EDITION.

THE following Drama, as the readers of two Editions which were printed for private circulation are already aware, was composed and printed without any hope of its being found capable of representation on the stage. Its publication in its present form was cotemporary with its production on the night of Mr. Macready's benefit, 26th of May, 1836; and as, at that time, its repetition was not anticipated, it was thought unnecessary to accompany it with any Preface. But as its performance has since been attended with unexpected success both in this country and in America, I may, without impropriety, state the views with which it was written, and indulge myself in the expression of my gratitude to those by whose assistance it has thus far been rendered vital. The first of those purposes will be best accomplished by extracting a portion of the Preface to the earliest of the unpublished Editions, which bears date in April, 1835 :—

“ The title of this Drama is borrowed from the Tragedy of Euripides, which gave the first hint of the situation

in which its hero is introduced—that of a foundling youth educated in a temple, and assisting in its services; but otherwise there is no resemblance between this imperfect sketch and that exquisite picture. It has been written, not indeed without a view to an ideal stage, which should never be absent from the mind of the humblest aspirant to dramatic composition, but without any hope of rendering it worthy to be acted. If it were regarded as a drama composed for actual representation, I am well aware that not in ‘matter of form’ only, but in ‘matter of substance,’ it would be found wanting. The idea of the principal character,—that of a nature essentially pure and disinterested, deriving its strength entirely from goodness and thought, not overcoming evil by the force of will, but escaping it by an insensibility to its approach,—vividly conscious of existence and its pleasures, yet willing to lay them down at the call of duty,—is scarcely capable of being rendered sufficiently striking in itself, or of being subjected to such agitations, as tragedy requires in its heroes. It was further necessary, in order to involve such a character in circumstances which might excite terror or grief or joy, to introduce other machinery than that of passions working naturally within, or events arising from ordinary and probable motives without; as its own elements would not supply the contests of tragic emotion, nor would its sufferings, however accumulated, present a varied or impressive picture. Recourse has therefore been had, not only to the old Grecian notion of Destiny, apart from all moral agencies, and to a prophecy indicating its purport in reference to the individuals involved in its chain, but to the idea of *fascination*, as an engine by which Fate may work its purposes on the innocent mind, and force it into terrible action most uncongenial to itself,

but necessary to the issue. Either perhaps of these aids might have been permitted, if used in accordance with the entire spirit of the piece; but the employment of *both* could not be justified in a drama intended for visual presentation, in which a certain verisimilitude is essential to the faith of the spectator. Whether any groups, surrounded with the associations of the Greek Mythology, and subjected to the capricious laws of Greek superstition, could be endowed by genius itself with such present life as to awaken the sympathies of an English audience, may well be doubted; but it cannot be questioned, that except by sustaining a stern unity of purpose, and breathing an atmosphere of Grecian sentiment over the whole, so as to render the picture national and coherent in all its traits, the effect must be unsatisfactory and unreal. Conscious of my inability to produce a work thus justified to the imagination by its own completeness and power, I have not attempted it; but have sought, out of mere weakness, for 'Fate and metaphysical aid,' to 'crown withal' the ordinary persons of a romantic play. I have therefore asked far too much for a spectator to grant: but the case is different with the reader who does not seek the powerful excitements of the theatre, nor is bound to a continuous attention; and who, for the sake of scattered sentiments or expressions which may please him, may, at least by a latitude of friendly allowance, forgive the incongruities of the machinery by which the story is conducted. This Drama may be described as the phantasm of a tragedy,—not a thing of substance mortised into the living rock of humanity,—and therefore incapable of exciting that interest which grows out of human feeling, or of holding that permanent place in the memory, which truth only can retain.

“ There are few perhaps among those who have written for the press, predominant as that majority now is over the minority of mere readers, who have not, at some season of their lives, contemplated the achievement of a tragedy. The narrow and well-defined limits by which the action of tragedy is circumscribed—the various affections which may live, and wrestle, and suffer within those palpable boundaries—its appeal to the sources of grief common to humanity on the one hand, and to the most majestic shapings of the imagination on the other, softening and subduing the heart to raise and to ennoble it,—and perhaps, more than all, the vivid presentment of the forms in which the strengths and weaknesses of our nature are embodied, its calamities dignified, and its high destiny vindicated, even in the mortal struggle by which for a season it is vanquished,—may well impress every mind, reaching, however feebly, towards the creative, with a fond desire to imitate the great masters of its ‘ so potent art.’ This desire has a powerful ally in the exuberant spirits of youth, when the mind, unchilled by the sad realities of life, searches out for novelty in those forms of sorrow, from which it afterwards may turn for relief to the flickerings of mirth, and to brief snatches of social pleasure. Perhaps ‘ gorgeous tragedy ’ left a deeper impression when she passed ‘ sweeping by ’ my intellectual vision, than would have been otherwise received by a mind unapt for so high a correspondence, by reason of the accident that the glimpse was stolen. Denied by the conscientious scruples of friends an early acquaintance with plays, I had derived from Mrs. More’s ‘ Sacred Dramas ’ my first sense of that peculiar enjoyment which the idea of dramatic action, however imperfectly conveyed, gives ; and stiff and cumbrous as they now seem, I

owe to their author that debt of gratitude, which others may perhaps share with me, who have first looked on the world of literature through the net-work of most sincere but exclusive opinions. These gave, however, but dim limits of the greatness which was behind ;—I looked into the domain of tragedy as into a mountain region covered with mist and cloud ;—and incapable of appreciating the deep humanities of Shakspeare, ‘rested and expatiated’ in the brocaded grandeurs of Dryden, Rowe, and Addison. To describe the delight with which, for the first time, I saw the curtain of Covent Garden Theatre raised for the representation of *Cato*, would be idle,—or how it was sustained during the noble performance which followed, when the visions of Roman constancy and classic grace, which had haunted the mind through all its school-boy years (then drawing to a close), seemed bodied forth in palpable form,—when the poor common-places of an artificial diction flowed ‘mended from the tongue’ of the actor, and the thoughtful words trembling on his lips suggested at once the feeling of earthly weakness and of immortal hope,—and when the old Stoic, in his rigid grandeur, was reconciled to the human heart by the struggle of paternal love, and became ‘passioned as ourselves,’ without losing any portion of that statue-like dignity which made him the representative of a world of heroic dreamings.

“After this glimpse of the acted drama, I was long haunted by the idle wish to write a tragedy ; and many hours did I happily, but vainly, spend in sober contemplations of its theme. I tried to wreathe several romantic and impossible stories, which I fashioned in my evening walks into acts, and began to write a scene ; but however pleased I might be with the outline of these fan-

tasies, I was too much disgusted with the alternate baldness and fustian of the blank verse, which I produced in the attempt to execute them, to proceed. At this time also, just as the laborious avocations of my life were commencing, my taste and feeling, as applied to poetry, underwent an entire change, consequent on my becoming acquainted with the poetry of Wordsworth. That power which, slighted and scoffed at as it was then, has since exerted a purifying influence on the literature of this country, such as no other individual power has ever wrought; which has not only given to the material universe 'a speech and a language' before unheard, but has opened new sources of enjoyment even in the works of the greatest poets of past days, and imparted a new sense by which we may relish them;—which, while on the one hand it has dissipated the sickly fascinations of gaudy phraseology, has, on the other, cast around the loveliest conditions a new and exquisite light, and traced out the links of good by which all human things are bound together, and clothed our earthly life in the solemnities which belong to its origin and its destiny—humbled the pride of my swelling conceits, and taught me to look on the mighty works of genius, not with the presumption of an imitator, but with the veneration of a child. For the early enjoyment of this great blessing, which the sneers of popular critics might otherwise have withheld from me for years, I am indebted to my friend Mr. Baron Field, now filling a judicial situation at Gibraltar, who overcame my reluctance to peruse what the 'Edinburgh Review' had so triumphantly derided. The love of contemplative poetry, thus inspired, led me, in such leisure as I could attain, rather to ponder over the resources of the profoundest emotions, or to regard them as associated with

the majestic forms of the universe, than to follow them into their violent conflicts and mournful catastrophes ; and although I never ceased to regard the acted drama as the most delightful of recreations, I sought no longer to work out a frigid imitation of writers, whom alone I could hope to copy, and whose enchantments were dissipated by more genial magic.

“ But the tragic drama was about to revive amongst us, and I was not insensible to its progress. Although the tragedies of the last twelve years are not worthy to be compared with the noblest productions of the great age of our drama, they are, with two or three exceptions, far superior to any which had been written in the interval. Since the last skirts of the glory of Shakspeare’s age disappeared, we shall search in vain for serious plays of equal power and beauty with *Virginus*, *William Tell*, *Mirandola*, *Rienzi*, or the *Merchant of London* ; at least, if we except *Venice Preserved* for the admirable conduct of its story, and *Douglas* for that romantic tenderness and pathos which have been too little appreciated of late years. It happened to me to be intimately acquainted with all those who contributed to this impulse, and to take an immediate interest in their successes. I also enjoyed the friendship of the delightful artist to whom all have by turns been indebted for the realisation of their noblest conceptions, and was enabled to enjoy with more exquisite relish the home-born affection with which those were endued, and the poetical grain breathed around them, by finding the same influences shed by Mr. Macready over the sphere of his social and domestic life. It will not be surprising, that, to one thus associated, the old wish to accomplish something in dramatic shape should recur, not accompanied by the hopes of sharing in the scenic

triumphs of his friends, but bounded by the possibility of conducting a tale through dialogue to a close, and of making it subserve to the expression of some cherished thoughts. In this state of feeling, some years ago, the scheme of the drama of *Ion* presented itself to me; and after brooding over it for some time, I wrote a prose outline of its successive scenes, nearly in the order and to the effect in which they are now completed, and made some progress in an opening scene, of which little now remains. The attempt was soon laid aside; for I found the composition of dramatic blank verse even more difficult now that I had present to me the ease and vividness of my friends, than when I had been contented to emulate the ponderous lines of the dramatists of Garrick's age. Still the idea of my hero occurred to me often; I found my pleasantest thoughts gathering about him; and rather more than two years ago I determined to make one essay more. Since that time such seasons of leisure as I could find have been devoted to the work; but I had so great distrust of my ability to complete it, that I did not mention my design to any one; and I cannot charge myself with having permitted it to interfere with any professional or private duty. It has been chiefly written in scraps of time; composed for the most part on journeys, and afterwards committed to paper; and thus, at the close of last year, I found four acts reduced into form. At this time, the sudden realisation of another youthful dream opened to me the prospect of additional duties, which I knew full well ought to preclude the continuance of those secret flirtations with the Muse in which I had indulged; and therefore I resolved to make a last effort, and, by completing my Drama before those duties should commence, to free myself from the bondage of those threads of fan-

tastical interest which had woven themselves about my mind. I accordingly wrote the fifth act with far more rapidity than any of the previous passages of my play; and, before I was called upon to share in more momentous business, I had communicated to a few friends the result of my scribblings, and bade adieu to my dramatic endeavours and hopes.

“ But it may well be asked, Why, with the sense I have of the febleness of this poetical sketch, I have ventured to intrude it on my friends? My chief reason is, that I am anxious to cast from my own mind the associations which have hung about it during the composition of the poem, and which, while it remained in manuscript susceptible of alteration, I could not certainly hope for; and, further, to preclude the charge, (if it should ever be brought to light hereafter,) that it had occupied leisure which henceforth must be devoted to other studies. I have also a desire to gratify myself by presenting it to my friends, especially to those who are removed to a distance; because, although as a *drama* it is unworthy the attention of the world, yet, as containing thoughts which have passed through my own mind, it may be acceptable to those whose conversation I can no longer enjoy. It would be a sufficient reason to myself for printing it, that I shall be able thus to remind Sir Edward Ryan, now, most honourably to himself and happily for India, Chief Justice of Bengal, and his excellent colleague Sir Benjamin Malkin, of the delightful hours we have spent together on the Oxford Circuit, when life was younger with us, and when some of the topics they will find just touched on in these verses were the themes of our graver walks between Ross and Monmouth, or in the deep winding valleys indenting the Table-Land above Church Stretton, or haply by

moonlight in the churchyard of Ross. I take leave to mention these as far away ; but there are others of my fellow-labourers at home, whose sympathy and whose conversation have cheered my professional life, who I believe will receive it cordially ; and among them I hope my sometimes Sessions-leader, who has committed a similar offence, though with more extenuating circumstances, by investing with so much dignity of passion and richness of language the story of the *Countess of Essex*, will not disdain it."

With these views *Ion* was sent to the press, and presented to many of my friends. The favour with which it was received by some, whose approbation was most valuable, would have induced me at once to publish it, if I had not been withheld by the suggestion of Mr. Macready, that it would be effective in representation, and by the belief that any interest which might be excited by such an attempt would be lessened by its previous sale. The prospect, that, at least for one evening, the dull tracery of thought, silently and laboriously woven, might burst into light at the torch of sympathy, and become palpable to the senses and the affections of a multitude, was too delightful to be resigned, and was ultimately realised by the friend who had opened it. His consent to produce the Drama on the night of his benefit, secured it against painful repulse ; and, although I had still no expectation that even *he* could endue it with sufficient interest to render it attractive on ordinary occasions, I looked forward to its single representation in the belief that it would be tolerated by an audience disposed to be gratified, and that the impression it might leave, however faint, would be genial and pure. Many of those who had expressed the most favourable opinions of the piece as a com-

position were even less sanguine than myself as to the probable event of the evening, and apprehended that it would terminate in their mortification and my own. They did not perceive the possibility of infusing such life into the character of its youthful hero, as would bring the whole fable within the sphere of human sympathies; reconcile the audience to its machinery; and render that which seemed only consistent in its dreaminess, at once entire and real. Such was, however, unquestionably the effect of Mr. Macready's performance on that evening, which I believe, in the judgment of many who cannot be influenced like the author by personal regard or individual gratitude, was one of the most remarkable triumphs of art which has graced the stage of late years. Although other of his performances are abstractedly greater, none I believe approach this as an effort of art, estimated with reference to the nature of the materials which he animated, to the difficulties which he subdued, and to the preconceptions which he charmed away. By the graces of beautiful elocution he beguiled the audience to receive the Drama as belonging to a range of associations which are no longer linked with the living world, but which retain an undying interest of a gentler cast, as a thing which *might have been*; and then, by his fearful power of making the fantastic real, he gradually rendered the whole possible—probable—true! The consequence of this extraordinary power of vivifying the frigid, and familiarising the remote, was to dissipate the fears of my friends; to render the play an object of attraction during the short remainder of the season; and to embolden others to attempt the part, and encourage other audiences to approve it, even when the power which first gave it sanction was wanting.

How little it was anticipated that the success of the first performance would justify its repetition may be gathered from the Prologue, which was spoken on that occasion by Mr. Serle—a gentleman, whose earnest and laborious pursuit of excellence as a dramatic poet and an actor, from early youth I have watched with admiration; whose success I have hailed with delight; and through whom I was most happy to express my feelings.

“ What airy visions on a play’s first night
 Have flash’d refulgent *here* on poet’s sight !
 While, emulous of glory’s stainless wreath,
 He felt ‘ the future in the instant ’ breathe ;
 Saw in the soften’d gleam of radiant eyes
 The sacred tear through lids yet tearless rise ;
 Made to each fervid heart the greet appeal
 To bear him witness—stamp’d with living seal—
 Of passion into forms of grandeur wrought,
 And grief by beauty tinged, or raised by thought :
 As cordial hands their liberal boon conferr’d,
 Fame’s awful whisper in the distance heard,
 Now shrunk from nicest fear, from fancied scorn,—
 Now glow’d with hope for ‘ ages yet unborn.’

“ With no such trembling sense of inward power
 Our author seeks to win his little hour,
 While, for a transient glance, he dares unveil
 The feeble outlines of a Grecian tale.
 He boasts no magic skill your souls to draw
 Within the circle of Athenian awe ;
 Where Fate on all things solemn beauty throws,
 And shapes heroic mourn in stern repose ;
 Or to reveal the fame where genius tips
 With love’s immortal lustre heavenly lips,

Where airs divine yet breathe around forms so fair,
 That Time enamour'd has been charm'd to spare ;
 Nor his the power which deeds of old imbues
 With present life, and tints with various hues ;
 Casts glowing passion in heroic moulds,
 And makes young feelings burn 'neath ancient folds :
 Unlearn'd in arts like these, he seeks to cast
 One faint reflection from the glorious past ;
 A narrow space his fond ambition bounds,—
 His little scenic life this evening rounds !

“ O ! if some image pure a moment play
 O'er the soul's mirror ere it pass away ;
 If from some chance-sown thought a genial nerve
 Should, heart-strung, quicken virtue's cause to serve ;
 Let these slight gifts the breath of kindness claim
 For one night's bubble on the sea of fame,
 Which tempts no aid which future praise insures,—
 But lives—glows—trembles—and expires in yours ! ”

The part of the heroine, which affords too little scope for the development of tragic power, was on this night graced by the elegance and the pathos of Miss Ellen Tree, which, as personated on that night, will long be perpetuated by the genius and taste of Mr. Lane. As her engagements at the Haymarket rendered it impossible for her to repeat the character at Covent Garden, the Drama was indebted to the zeal and good-nature of Miss Helen Faucit for accepting it under these peculiar circumstances, and studying it within a few days, and to her talent for giving to it an importance which the author could not hope for from the faintness of its outline. Its subsequent production at the Haymarket calls for a sincere acknowledgment to Mr. Morris, the veteran

manager of that delightful place of entertainment, and to all the members of his company, especially to Mr. Vandenhoff for his kingly personation of Adrastus ; to Miss Taylor for her earnest and affecting Clemanthe ; and, most of all, to the original representative of the heroine, who now illustrated the hero, and who has made the story of his sufferings and his virtues familiar to Transatlantic ears. Who is there who does not feel proud of the just appreciation, by the great American people, of one who is not only the exquisite representative of a range of delightful characters, but of all that is most graceful and refined in English womanhood,—or fail to cherish a wish for her fame and happiness, as if she were a personal friend or relation of his own ?

There is one circumstance attendant on the circulation of this Drama, which has afforded me peculiar gratification—that it has been read without disapproval by many of those estimable persons whose conscientious scruples withhold them from the theatre, and has won some of them to confess that there is nothing in the form of dramatic poetry necessarily akin to guilty passions and ignoble aims. I am well aware, that it is indebted for this fortune not to any tone of moral feeling superior to that which is to be felt in its more powerful cotemporaries, but to the incidental relations of its author, and to the manner of its original distribution ; and I refer to it, therefore, with pleasure rather than with pride. If such as these are still deterred from sharing in the refined enjoyments of the acted drama, and from permitting their children to receive from it the vivid impressions which it leaves, by a just fear of the accidental influences with which it has been too frequently associated, they may be assured that an opportunity is now offered to them

of accepting the benefit without the alloy. They will find one of those great theatres—where alone the mightiest effects of heroic action and suffering can ever be felt, or their greatness fitly presented,—under the direction of an artist whose personal worth might grace any profession or rank, and who, in seeking to dissipate the languor which has crept over the general heart in reference to the stage, at the sacrifice of his own health and ease, and the risk of his well-earned fortune, has had the virtue and the courage to cast away all vicious appliances, and to discourage every blandishment except those by which Art embodies the conceptions of Genius. To Covent Garden Theatre the sternest moralist may now conduct those whose moral nurture he regards as his most anxious and most delightful duty, without fear lest their minds should be diverted from the blameless gaieties or noble passion of the scene by intrusive suggestions of vice, which he would skreen, as far as possible, from their thoughts. If, indeed, dramatic representation itself is essentially evil; if it is a crime to render historic truths more vivid by calling forth its august figures from the depth of time and the silence of books, ‘in their habits as they lived;’ if it is a sin to displace the vapidness of conversation, revolving in its own small circle of personal experiences, by presenting the genial eccentricities of character to be at once laughed at and loved, and imaging the graces of society without its bitterness; if it is an offence against the Beneficent Author of our Being ‘to hold a mirror up’ to the nature he has moulded, in which its grandest and its fairest varieties shall be reflected in the happiest combinations, as that choicest of all His human works—a poet’s soul—has cast them; the attempts to remove from the magic glass all external impurities must be fruitless. But if

there are those who, while they hold the faith and morals of Milton, are not afraid to accept his precept and to follow his example, I would entreat of them to assist the lessee of a great national theatre in his generous struggle to rescue the stage from the pollutions which have too long debased it. I urge this on them thus earnestly, because, in proportion as the dissipated and frivolous have withdrawn from this intellectual enjoyment, it becomes their province to sustain it; because I firmly believe that its maintenance is most important to the expansion of all that is social, and to the nurture of all that is great within us; because I deem it—not as an instructor in the way of direct moral invitation or purpose—but as dissolving the crust of selfishness which daily cares and labours gradually form about the kindest hearts; as softening the pride of conventional virtue, and bringing the outcasts of humanity within its sphere; and as combining all the picturesque varieties which external distinctions present with the sense of the noble equality which lies beneath them. If the introduction of this Drama to the notice of some who have hitherto abstained from visiting the theatre by objection to extrinsic circumstances, should induce them to enjoy the representation of plays of far deeper sentiment and far more vivid passion, it will not have been written nor acted in vain.

T. N. T.

London, 14th November, 1837.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA,

AS REPRESENTED AT COVENT GARDEN THEATRE.

ADRASTUS, King of Argos,	{ <i>Mr. Dale,</i> <i>Mr. Vandenhoff.</i>
MEDON, { High Priest of the Temple of Apollo,	} <i>Mr. Thompson.</i>
CRYTHES, Captain of the Royal Guard,	{ <i>Mr. C. Hill,</i> <i>Mr. Roberts.</i>
PHOCION, son of Medon,	<i>Mr. G. Bennett.</i>
CTESIPHON, } CASSANDER, } noble Argive youths,	{ <i>Mr. H. Wallack,</i> <i>Mr. J. Webster.</i> <i>Mr. Howard.</i>
ION,	<i>Mr. Macready.</i>
AGENOR, } CLEON, } sages of Argos, TIMOCLES, }	{ <i>Mr. Pritchard.</i> <i>Mr. Tilbury.</i> <i>Mr. Harris.</i>
IRUS, a boy, slave to Agenor,	<i>Miss Lane.</i>
CLEMANTHE, daughter of Medon,	{ <i>Miss Ellen Tree,</i> <i>Miss H. Faucit.</i>
ABRA, attendant on Clemanthe,	<i>Miss Lacy.</i>

SCENE—Argos.

THE TIME of the Action is comprised in one day and night
and the following morning.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA,

AS REPRESENTED AT THE HAYMARKET THEATRE.

ADRASTUS, King of Argos,	{ Mr. Vandenhoff, Mr. Elton.
CRYTHES, Captain of the Royal Guard,	Mr. Yarnold.
MEDON, { High Priest of the Temple of Apollo, }	Mr. Selby.
PHOCION, son of Medon,	Mr. J. Vining.
CTESIPHON, } noble Argive youths, CASSANDER, }	{ Mr. Vining. Mr. Saville.
ION,	Miss Ellen Tree.
AGENOR, } CLEON, } sages of Argos, TIMOCLES, }	{ Mr. Haines. Mr. Gough. Mr. Gallot.
IRUS, a boy, slave to Agenor,	Miss E. Phillips.
CLEMANTHE, daughter of Medon,	Miss Taylor.
ABRA, attendant on Clemanthe,	Miss Gordon.

I O N ;
A T R A G E D Y.

A C T I.

SCENE I.

The Interior of the Temple of Apollo, which is supposed to be placed on a rocky eminence. Early morning. The interior lighted by a single lamp suspended from the roof. AGENOR resting against a column;—IRUS seated on a bench at the side of the scene.

AGENOR comes forward and speaks.

AGENOR.

WILL the dawn never visit us? These hours
Toil heavy with the unresting curse they bear
To do the work of desolating years!
All distant sounds are hush'd;—the shriek of death
And the survivors' wail are now unheard,
As grief had worn itself to patience. Irus!

I 'm loth so soon to break thy scanty rest,
 But my heart sickens for the tardy morn;
 Sure it is breaking;—speed and look—yet hold,
 Know'st thou the fearful shelf of rock that hangs
 Above the encroaching waves, the loftiest point
 That stretches eastward?

IRUS.

Know it? Yes, my Lord;
 There often have I bless'd the opening day,
 Which thy free kindness gave me leave to waste
 In happy wandering through the forests.

AGENOR.

Well,
 Thou art not then afraid to tread it; there
 The earliest streak from the unrisen sun
 Is to be welcomed;—tell me how it gleams,
 In bloody portent or in saffron hope,
 And hasten back to slumber.

IRUS.

I shall hasten:
 Believe not that thy summons broke my rest;
 I was not sleeping. [Exit IRUS.]

AGENOR.

Heaven be with thee, child!
 His grateful mention of delights bestow'd
 On that most piteous state of servile childhood
 By liberal words chance-dropp'd, hath touch'd a vein
 Of feeling which I deem'd for ever numb'd,
 And, by a gush of household memories, breaks

The icy casing of that thick despair
Which day by day hath gather'd o'er my heart,
While, basely safe, within this column'd circle,
Uplifted far into the purer air
And by Apollo's partial love secured,
I have, in spirit, glided with the Plague
As in foul darkness or in sickliest light
It wafted death through Argos; and mine ears,
Listening athirst for any human sound,
Have caught the dismal cry of confused pain,
Which to this dizzy height the fitful wind
Hath borne from each sad quarter of the vale
Where life was.

Re-enter IRUS.

Are there signs of day-break?

IRUS.

None;

The eastern sky is still unbroken gloom.

AGENOR.

It cannot surely be. Thine eyes are dim
(No fault of thine) for want of rest, or now
I look upon them near, with scalding tears.
Hath care alighted on a head so young!
What grief hast thou been weeping?

IRUS.

Pardon me;

I never thought at such a mournful time
To plead my humble sorrow in excuse
Of poorly-render'd service: but my brother—

AGENOR.

What, Ion

The only inmate of this fane allow'd
To seek the mournful walks where death is busy!—
Ion our sometime darling, whom we prized
As a stray gift, by bounteous Heaven dismiss'd
From some bright sphere which sorrow may not cloud
To make the happy happier! Is *he* sent
To grapple with the miseries of this time,
Whose nature such ethereal aspect wears
As it would perish at the touch of wrong?
By no internal contest is he train'd
For such hard duty; no emotions rude
Hath his clear spirit vanquish'd;—Love, the germ
Of his mild nature, hath spread graces forth,
Expanding with its progress, as the store
Of rainbow colour which the seed conceals
Sheds out its tints from its dim treasury,
To flush and circle in the flower. No tear
Hath fill'd his eye save that of thoughtful joy
When, in the evening stillness, lovely things
Press'd on his soul too busily; his voice,
If, in the earnestness of childish sports,
Raised to the tone of anger, check'd its force,
As if it fear'd to break its being's law,
And falter'd into music; when the forms
Of guilty passion have been made to live
In pictured speech, and others have wax'd loud
In righteous indignation, he hath heard

With sceptic smile, or from some slender vein
Of goodness, which surrounding gloom conceal'd,
Struck sunlight o'er it: so his life hath flow'd
From its mysterious urn a sacred stream,
In whose calm depth the beautiful and pure
Alone are mirror'd; which, though shapes of ill
May hover round its surface, glides in light,
And takes no shadow from them.

CLEON.

Yet, methinks,
Thou hast not lately met him, or a change
Pass'd strangely on him had not miss'd thy wonder.
His form appears dilated; in those eyes
Where pleasure danced, a thoughtful sadness dwells;
Stern purpose knits the forehead, which till now
Knew not the passing wrinkle of a care:
Those limbs which in their heedless motion own'd
A stripling's playful happiness, are strung
As if the iron hardships of the camp
Had given them sturdy nurture; and his step,
Its airiness of yesterday forgotten,
Awakes the echoes of these desolate courts,
As if a hero of gigantic mould
Paced them in armour.

AGENOR.

Hope is in thy tale.
This is no freak of Nature's wayward course,
But work of pitying Heaven; for not in vain
The gods have pour'd into that guileless heart

The strengths that nerve the hero ;—they are ours.

CLEON.

How can he aid us? Can he stay the pulse
Of ebbing life,—arrest the infected winds,
Or smite the hungry spectre of the grave?

AGENOR.

And dost thou think these breezes are our foes,—
The innocent airs that used to dance around us,
As if they felt the blessings they convey'd,
Or that the death they bear is casual? No!
'Tis human guilt that blackens in the cloud,
Flashes athwart its mass in jagged fire,
Whirls in the hurricane, pollutes the air,
Turns all the joyous melodies of earth
To murmurings of doom. There is a foe
Who in the glorious summit of the state
Draws down the great resentment of the gods,
Whom he defies to strike us ;—yet his power
Partakes that just infirmity which Nature
Blends in the empire of her proudest sons—
That it is cased within a single breast,
And may be pluck'd thence by a single arm.
Let but that arm, selected by the gods,
Do its great office on the tyrant's life,
And Argos breathes again!

CLEON.

A footstep!—hush!

Thy wishes, falling on a slavish ear,
Would tempt another outrage: 'tis a friend—

An honest though a crabbed one—Timocles :
 Something hath ruffled him.—Good day, Timocles !

[TIMOCLES *passes in front.*

He will not speak to us.

AGENOR.

But he *shall* speak.

Timocles—nay then, thus I must enforce thee ;

[*staying him.*

Sure thou wilt not refuse a comrade's hand
 That may be cold ere sunset.

TIMOCLES. [giving his hand.

Thou mayst school me ;

Thy years and love have license : but I own not
 A stripling's mastery ; is 't fit, Agenor ?

AGENOR.

Nay, thou must tell thy wrong ; whate'er it prove,
 I hail thy anger as a hopeful sign,
 For it revives the thought of household days,
 When the small bickerings of friends had space
 To fret, and Death was not for ever nigh
 To frown upon Estrangement. What has moved thee ?

TIMOCLES.

I blush to tell it. Weary of the night
 And of my life, I sought the western portal :
 It opened, when ascending from the stair
 That through the rock winds spiral from the town,
 Ion, the foundling cherish'd by the Priest,
 Stood in the entrance : with such mild command
 As he has often smilingly obey'd,

I bade him stand aside and let me pass ;
 When—wouldst thou think it?—in determined speech
 He gave me counsel to return ; I press'd
 Impatient onward : he, with honied phrase
 His daring act excusing, grasp'd my arm
 With strength resistless ; led me from the gate ;
 Replaced its ponderous bars ; and, with a look
 As modest as he wore in childhood, left me.

AGENOR.

And thou wilt thank him for it soon ; he comes—
 Now hold thy angry purpose if thou canst !

Enter ION.

ION.

I seek thee, good Timocles, to implore
 Again thy pardon. I am young in trust,
 And fear lest, in the earnestness of love,
 I stayed thy course too rudely. Thou hast borne
 My childish folly often,—do not frown
 If I have ventured with unmanner'd zeal
 To guard the ripe experiences of years
 From one rash moment's danger.

TIMOCLES.

Leave thy care.

If I am weary of the flutterer life,
 Is mortal bidding thus to cage it in ?

ION.

And art thou tired of being ? Has the grave
 No terrors for thee ? Hast thou sunder'd quite

Those thousand meshes which old custom weaves
To bind us earthward, and gay fancy films
With airy lustre various? Hast subdued
Those cleavings of the spirit to its prison,
Those nice regards, dear habits, pensive memories,
That change the valour of the thoughtful breast
To brave dissimulation of its fears?
Is Hope quench'd in thy bosom? Thou art free,
And in the simple dignity of man
Standest apart untempted:—do not lose
The great occasion thou hast pluck'd from misery,
Nor play the spendthrift with a great despair,
But use it nobly!

TIMOCLES.

What, to strike? to slay?

ION.

No!—not unless the audible voice of Heaven
Call thee to that dire office; but to shed
On ears abused by falsehood, truths of power
In words immortal,—not such words as flash
From the fierce demagogue's unthinking rage,
To madden for a moment and expire,—
Nor such as the rapt orator imbues
With warmth of facile sympathy, and moulds
To mirrors radiant with fair images,
To grace the noble fervour of an hour;—
But words which bear the spirits of great deeds
Wing'd for the Future; which the dying breath
Of Freedom's martyr shapes as it exhales,

And to the most enduring forms of earth
 Commits—to linger in the craggy shade
 Of the huge valley, 'neath the eagle's home,
 Or in the sea-cave where the tempest sleeps,
 Till some heroic leader bid them wake
 To thrill the world with echoes!—But I talk
 Of things above my grasp, which strangely press
 Upon my soul, and tempt me to forget
 The duties of my youth;—pray you forgive me.

TIMOCLES.

Have I not said so?

AGENOR.

Welcome to the morn!

The eastern gates unfold, the Priest approaches;

[*As AGENOR speaks, the great gates at the back of the scene open; the sea is discovered far beneath,—the dawn breaking over it; MEDON, the Priest, enters attended.*]

And lo! the sun is struggling with the gloom,
 Whose masses fill the eastern sky, and tints
 Its edges with dull red;—but he *will* triumph;
 Bless'd be the omen!

MEDON.

God of light and joy,

Once more delight us with thy healing beams!
 If I may trace thy language in the clouds
 That wait upon thy rising, help is nigh—
 But help achieved in blood.

ION.

Sayst thou in blood ?

MEDON.

Yes, Ion !—why, he sickens at the word,
Spite of his new-born strength ;—the sights of woe
That he will seek have shed their paleness on him.
Has this night's walk shown more than common sorrow ?

ION.

I pass'd the palace where the frantic king
Yet holds his crimson revel, whence the roar
Of desperate mirth came, mingling with the sigh
Of death-subdued robustness, and the gleam
Of festal lamps mid spectral columns hung
Flaunting o'er shapes of anguish made them ghastlier.
How can I cease to tremble for the sad ones
He mocks—and him the wretchedest of all ?

TIMOCLES.

And canst thou pity him ? Dost thou discern,
Amidst his impious darings, plea for him ?

ION.

Is he not childless, friendless, and a king ?
He 's human ; and some pulse of good must live
Within his nature—have ye tried to wake it ?

MEDON.

Yes ; I believe he felt our sufferings once ;
When, at my strong entreaty, he dispatch'd
Phocion my son to Delphos, there to seek
Our cause of sorrow ; but, as time dragg'd on
Without his messenger's return, he grew

Impatient of all counsel,—to his palace
 In awful mood retiring, wildly call'd
 The reckless of his court to share his stores
 And end all with him. When we dared disturb
 His dreadful feasting with a humble prayer
 That he would meet us, the poor slave, who bore
 The message, flew back smarting from the scourge,
 And mutter'd a decree that he who next
 Unbidden met the tyrant's glance should die.

AGENOR.

I am prepared to brave it.

CLEON.

So am I.

TIMOCLES.

And I—

ION.

O Sages, do not think my prayer
 Bespeaks unseemly forwardness—send me!
 The coarsest reed that trembles in the marsh,
 If Heaven select it for its instrument,
 May shed celestial music on the breeze
 As clearly as the pipe whose virgin gold
 Befits the lip of Phœbus;—ye are wise,
 And needed by your country; ye are fathers;
 I am a lone stray thing, whose little life
 By strangers' bounty cherish'd, like a wave
 That from the summer sea a wanton breeze
 Lifts for a moment's sparkle, will subside
 Light as it rose, nor leave a sigh in breaking.

MEDON.

Ion, no sigh!

ION.

Forgive me if I seem'd
To doubt that thou wilt mourn me if I fall;
Nor would I tax thy love with such a fear,
But that high promptings, which could never rise
Spontaneous in my nature, bid me plead
Thus boldly for the mission.

MEDON.

My brave boy!
It shall be as thou wilt. I see thou art call'd
To this great peril, and I will not stay thee.
When wilt thou be prepared to seek it?

ION.

Now.

Only before I go, thus, on my knee,
Let me in one word thank thee for a life
Made by thy love a cloudless holiday;
And O, my more than father! let me look
Up to thy face as if indeed a father's,
And give me a son's blessing.

MEDON.

Bless thee, son!
I should be marble now; let's part at once.

ION.

If I should not return, bless Phocion from me;
And, for Clemanthe—may I speak one word,
One parting word with my fair playfellow?

MEDON.

If thou wouldst have it so, thou shalt.

ION.

Farewell then!

Your prayers wait on my steps. The arm of Heaven
I feel in life or death will be around me.

[*Exit.*]

MEDON.

O grant it be in life! Let 's to the sacrifice.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

*An apartment of the Temple. Enter CLEMANTHE
followed by ABRA.*

CLEMANTHE.

Is he so changed?

ABRA.

His bearing is so alter'd,
That, distant, I scarce knew him for himself;
But, looking in his face, I felt his smile
Gracious as ever, though its sweetness wore
Unwonted sorrow in it.

CLEMANTHE.

He will go
To some high fortune, and forget us all,
Reclaim'd (be sure of it) by noble parents;
Me he forgets already; for five days,
Five melancholy days, I have not seen him.

ABRA.

Thou knowest that he has privilege to range
The infected city; and, 'tis said, he spends
The hours of needful rest in squalid hovels
Where death is most forsaken.

CLEMANTHE.

Why is this?

Why should my father, niggard of the lives
Of aged men, be prodigal of youth
So rich in glorious prophecy as his?

ABRA.

He comes to answer for himself. I'll leave you. [*Exit.*]

CLEMANTHE.

Stay! Well my heart may guard its secret best
By its own strength.

Enter ION.

ION.

How fares my pensive sister?

CLEMANTHE.

How should I fare but ill when the pale hand
Draws the black foldings of the eternal curtain
Closer and closer round us—Phocion absent—
And thou, forsaking all within thy home,
Wilt risk thy life with strangers, in whose aid
Even thou canst do but little?

ION.

It is little:

But in these sharp extremities of fortune,

The blessings which the weak and poor can scatter
 Have their own season. 'Tis a little thing
 To give a cup of water ; yet its draught
 Of cool refreshment, drain'd by fever'd lips,
 May give a shock of pleasure to the frame
 More exquisite than when nectarean juice
 Renews the life of joy in happiest hours.
 It is a little thing to speak a phrase
 Of common comfort which by daily use
 Has almost lost its sense ; yet on the ear
 Of him who thought to die unmourn'd 'twill fall
 Like choicest music ; fill the glazing eye
 With gentle tears ; relax the knotted hand
 To know the bonds of fellowship again ;
 And shed on the departing soul a sense
 More precious than the benison of friends
 About the honor'd death-bed of the rich,
 To him who else were lonely, that another
 Of the great family is near and feels.

CLEMANTHE.

Oh, thou canst never bear these mournful offices !
 So blithe, so merry once ! Will not the sight
 Of frenzied agonies unfix thy reason,
 Or the dumb woe congeal thee ?

ION.

No, Clemanthe ;
 They are the patient sorrows that touch nearest !
 If thou hadst seen the warrior when he writhed
 In the last grapple of his sinewy frame

With conquering anguish, strive to cast a smile
(And not in vain) upon his fragile wife,
Waning beside him,—and, his limbs composed,
The widow of the moment fix her gaze
Of longing, speechless love, upon the babe,
The only living thing which yet was hers,
Spreading its arms for its own resting-place,
Yet with attenuated hand wave off
The unstricken child, and so embraceless die,
Stifling the mighty hunger of the heart ;
Thou couldst endure the sight of selfish grief
In sullenness or frenzy ;—but to-day
Another lot falls on me.

CLEMANTHE.

Thou wilt leave us !

I read it plainly in thy alter'd mien ;—
Is it for ever ?

ION.

That is with the gods !

I go but to the palace, urged by hope,
Which from afar hath darted on my soul,
That to the humbleness of one like me
The haughty king may listen.

CLEMANTHE.

To the palace !

Knowest thou the peril—nay the certain issue
That waits thee ? Death !—The tyrant has decreed it,
Confirmed it with an oath ; and he has power
To keep that oath ; for, hated as he is,

The reckless soldiers who partake his riot
Are swift to do his bidding.

ION.

I know all ;
But they who call me to the work can shield me,
Or make me strong to suffer.

CLEMANTHE.

Then the sword
Falls on thy neck ! O Gods ! to think that thou,
Who in the plenitude of youthful life
Art now before me, ere the sun decline,
Perhaps in one short hour shall lie cold, cold,
To speak, smile, bless no more !—Thou shalt not go !

ION.

Thou must not stay me, fair one ; even thy father,
Who (blessings on him !) loves me as his son,
Yields to the will of Heaven.

CLEMANTHE.

And he can do this !
I shall not bear his presence if thou fallest
By his consent ; so shall I be alone.

ION.

Phocion will soon return, and juster thoughts
Of thy admiring father close the gap
Thy old companion left behind him.

CLEMANTHE.

Never !

What will to me be father, brother, friends,
When thou art gone—the light of our life quench'd—

CLEMANTHE.

Thou canst not mean it!

Have I disclaim'd all maiden bashfulness,
To tell the cherish'd secret of my soul
To my soul's master, and in rich return
Obtain'd the dear assurance of his love,
To hear him speak that miserable word
I cannot—will not echo?

ION.

Heaven has call'd me,
And I have pledged my honor. When thy heart
Bestow'd its preference on a friendless boy,
Thou didst not image him a recreant; nor
Must he prove so, by thy election crown'd.
Thou hast endowed me with a right to claim
Thy help through this our journey, be its course
Lengthen'd to age, or in an hour to end;
And now I ask it!—bid my courage hold,
And with thy free approval send me forth
In soul apparell'd for my office!

CLEMANTHE.

Go!

I would not have thee other than thou art,
Living or dying—and if thou shouldst fall—

ION.

Be sure I shall return.

CLEMANTHE.

If thou shouldst fall,
I shall be happier as the affianced bride

Of thy cold ashes, than in proudest fortunes—

Thine—ever thine—

[*she faints in his arms.*]

ION. [*calls.*]

Abra!—So best to part— [*Enter ABRA.*]

Let her have air; be near her through the day;

I know thy tenderness—should ill news come

Of any friend, she will require it all.

[*ABRA bears CLEMANTHE out.*]

Ye Gods, that have enrich'd the life ye claim

With priceless treasure, strengthen me to yield it!

[*Exit.*]

END OF ACT

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A Terrace of the Palace.

ADRASTUS, CRYTHES.

ADRASTUS.

THE air breathes freshly after our long night
Of glorious revelry. I 'll walk awhile.

CRYTHES.

It blows across the town; dost thou not fear
It bear infection with it?

ADRASTUS.

Fear! dost talk
Of fear to me? I deem'd even thy poor thoughts
Had better scann'd their master. Prithee tell me
In what act, word, or look, since I have borne
Thy converse here, hast thou discern'd such baseness
As makes thee bold to prate to me of fear?

CRYTHES.

My liege, of human might all know thee fearless,
But may not heroes shun the elements
When sickness taints them?

ADRASTUS.

Let them blast me now!—

I stir not; tremble not; these massive walls,
 Whose date o'erawes tradition, gird the home
 Of a great race of kings, along whose line
 The eager mind lives aching, through the darkness
 Of ages else unstoried, till its shapes
 Of armed sovereigns spread to godlike port,
 And, frowning in the uncertain dawn of time,
 Strike awe, as powers who ruled an elder world,
 In mute obedience. I, sad heriter
 Of all their glories, feel our doom is nigh;
 And I will meet it as befits their fame;
 Nor will I vary my selected path
 The breadth of my sword's edge, nor check a wish,
 If such unkingly yielding might avert it.

CRYTHES.

Thou art ever royal in thy thoughts.

ADRASTUS.

No more—

I would be private.

[*Exit* CRYTHES.]

Grovelling parasite!

Why should I waste these fate-environ'd hours,
 And pledge my great defiance to despair
 With flatterers such as thou;—as if my joys
 Required the pale reflections cast by slaves
 In mirror'd mockery round my throne, or lack'd
 The aid of reptile sympathies to stream
 Through fate's black pageantry? Let weakness seek

Companionship : I 'll henceforth feast alone.

Enter a Soldier.

SOLDIER.

My liege, forgive me.

ADRASTUS.

Well ! Speak out at once

Thy business, and retire.

SOLDIER.

I have no part
In the presumptuous message that I bear.

ADRASTUS.

Tell it, or go. There is no time to waste
On idle terrors.

SOLDIER.

Thus it is, my lord :—

As we were burnishing our arms, a man
Enter'd the court, and when we saw him first
Was tending towards the palace ; in amaze,
We hail'd the rash intruder ; still he walk'd
Unheeding onward, till the western gate
Barr'd further course ; then turning, he besought
Our startled band to herald him to thee,
That he might urge a message which the sages
Had charged him to deliver.

ADRASTUS.

Ha ! the greybeards
Who, mid the altars of the gods, conspire
To cast the image of supernal power

From earth its shadow consecrates. What sage
Is so resolved to play the orator
That he would die for 't?

SOLDIER.

He is but a youth,
Yet urged his prayer with a sad constancy
Which could not be denied.

ADRASTUS.

Most bravely plann'd!
Sedition worthy of the reverend host
Of sophist traitors ; brave to scatter fancies
Of discontent midst sturdy artisans,
Whose honest sinews they direct unseen,
And make their proxies in the work of peril!—
'Tis fit, when burning to insult their king,
And warn'd the pleasure must be bought with life,
Their valour send a boy to speak their wisdom!
Thou know'st my last decree ; tell this rash youth
The danger he incurs ;—then let him pass,
And own the king more gentle than his masters.

SOLDIER.

We have already told him of the fate
Which waits his daring ; courteously he thank'd us,
But still with solemn accent urged his suit.

ADRASTUS.

Tell him once more, if he persists, he dies—
Then, if he will, admit him. Should he hold
His purpose, order Crythes to conduct him,
And see the headsman instantly prepare

To do his office.

[*Exit* SOLDIER.]

So resolved, so young—

'Twere pity he should fall; yet he *must* fall,
 Or the great sceptre, which hath sway'd the fears
 Of ages, will become a common staff
 For youth to wield or age to rest upon,
 Despoil'd of all its virtues. He *must* fall,
 Else they who prompt the insult will grow bold,
 And with their pestilent vauntings through the city
 Raise the low fog of murky discontent,
 Which now creeps harmless through its marshy birth-
 place,
 To veil my setting glories. He is warn'd;
 And if he cross yon threshold, he shall die.

Enter CRYTHES and ION.

CRYTHES.

The king!

ADRASTUS.

Stranger, I bid thee welcome;
 We are about to tread the same dark passage,
 Thou almost on the instant.—Is the sword

[*To* CRYTHES.]

Of justice sharpen'd, and the headsman ready?

CRYTHES.

Thou mayst behold them plainly in the court;
 Even now the solemn soldiers line the ground,
 The steel gleams on the altar; and the slave
 Disrobes himself for duty.

ADRASTUS. [*to ION.*]

Dost thou see them?

ION.

I do.

ADRASTUS.

By Heaven, he does not change!

If, even now, thou wilt depart and leave

Thy traitorous thoughts unspoken, thou art free.

ION.

I thank thee for thy offer; but I stand

Before thee for the lives of thousands, rich

In all that makes life precious to the brave;

Who perish not alone, but in their fall

Break the far-spreading tendrils that they feed,

And leave them nurtureless. If thou wilt hear me

For them, I am content to speak no more.

ADRASTUS.

Thou hast thy wish then. Crythes! till yon dial

Cast its thin shadow on the approaching hour,

I hear this gallant traitor. On the instant,

Come without word, and lead him to his doom.

Now leave us.

CRYTHES.

What, alone?

ADRASTUS.

Yes, slave! alone.

He is no assassin!

[*Exit* CRYTHES.]

Tell me who thou art.

What generous source owns that heroic blood,

Which holds its course thus bravely? What great wars
Have nursed the courage that can look on death,
Certain and speedy death, with placid eye?

ION.

I am a simple youth, who never bore
The weight of armour,—one who may not boast
Of noble birth or valour of his own.
Deem not the powers which nerve me thus to speak
In thy great presence, and have made my heart
Upon the verge of bloody death as calm,
As equal in its beatings, as when sleep
Approach'd me nestling from the sportive toils
Of thoughtless childhood, and celestial dreams
Began to glimmer through the deepening shadows
Of soft oblivion, to belong to me!—
These are the strengths of Heaven; to thee they speak,
Bid thee to hearken to thy people's cry,
Or warn thee that thy hour must shortly come!

ADRASTUS.

I know it must; so mayst thou spare thy warnings.
The envious gods in me have doom'd a race,
Whose glories stream from the same cloud-girt founts,
Whence their own dawn'd upon the infant world;
And I shall sit on my ancestral throne
To meet their vengeance; but till then I rule
As I have ever ruled, and thou wilt feel.

ION.

I will not further urge thy safety to thee;
It may be, as thou sayst, too late; nor seek

To make thee tremble at the gathering curse
Which shall burst forth in mockery at thy fall;
But thou art gifted with a nobler sense—
I know thou art, my sovereign!—sense of pain
Endured by myriad Argives, in whose souls,
And in whose father's souls, thou and thy fathers
Have kept their cherish'd state; whose heartstrings, still
The living fibres of thy rooted power,
Quiver with agonies thy crimes have drawn
From heavenly justice on them.

ADRASTUS.

How! my crimes?

ION.

Yes; 'tis the eternal law, that where guilt is,
Sorrow shall answer it; and thou hast not
A poor man's privilege to bear alone,
Or in the narrow circle of his kinsmen,
The penalties of evil, for in thine
A nation's fate lies circled.—King Adrastus!
Steel'd as thy heart is with the usages
Of pomp and power, a few short summers since
Thou wert a child, and canst not be relentless.
Oh, if maternal love embraced thee then,
Think of the mothers who with eyes unwet
Glare o'er their perishing children: hast thou shared
The glow of a first friendship, which is born
Midst the rude sports of boyhood, think of youth
Smitten amidst its playthings;—let the spirit
Of thy own innocent childhood whisper pity!

ADRASTUS.

In every word thou dost but steal my soul.
My youth was blasted ;—parents, brother, kin—
All that should people infancy with joy—
Conspired to poison mine ; despoiled my life
Of innocence and hope—all but the sword
And sceptre—dost thou wonder at me now ?

ION.

I knew that we should pity—

ADRASTUS.

Pity ! dare

To speak that word again, and torture waits thee !
I am yet king of Argos. Well, go on—
Thy time is short, and I am pledged to hear.

ION.

If thou hast ever loved—

ADRASTUS.

Beware ! beware !

ION.

Thou hast ! I see thou hast ! Thou art not marble,
And thou shalt hear me !—Think upon the time
When the clear depths of thy yet lucid soul
Were ruffled with the troublings of strange joy,
As if some unseen visitant from heaven
Touch'd the calm lake and wreath'd its images
In sparkling waves ;—recall the dallying hope
That on the margin of assurance trembled,
As loth to lose in certainty too bless'd
Its happy being ;—taste in thought again

Of the stolen sweetness of those evening-walks,
 When pansioned turf was air to winged feet,
 And circling forests, by ethereal touch
 Enchanted, wore the livery of the sky,
 As if about to melt in golden light
 Shapes of one heavenly vision; and thy heart,
 Enlarged by its new sympathy with one,
 Grew bountiful to all!

ADRASTUS.

That tone! that tone!

Whence came it? from thy lips? It cannot be—
 The long-hush'd music of the only voice
 That ever spake unbought affection to me,
 And waked my soul to blessing!—O sweet hours
 Of golden joy, ye come! your glories break
 Through my pavilion'd spirit's sable folds!
 Roll on! roll on!—Stranger, thou dost enforce me
 To speak of things unbreathed by lip of mine
 To human ear:—wilt listen?

ION.

As a child.

ADRASTUS.

Again!—that voice again!—thou hast seen me moved
 As never mortal saw me, by a tone
 Which some light breeze, enamour'd of the sound,
 Hath wafted through the woods, till thy young voice
 Caught it to rive and melt me. At my birth
 This city, which, expectant of its Prince,
 Lay hush'd, broke out in clamorous ecstasies;

Yet, in that moment, while the uplifted cups
 Foam'd with the choicest product of the sun,
 And welcome thunder'd from a thousand throats,
 My doom was seal'd. From the hearth's vacant space,
 In the dark chamber where my mother lay,
 Faint with the sense of pain-bought happiness,
 Came forth, in heart-appalling tone, these words
 Of me the nurseling—"Woe unto the babe!
 "Against the life which now begins shall life,
 "Lighted from thence, be arm'd, and, both soon quench'd,
 "End this great line in sorrow!"—Ere I grew
 Of years to know myself a thing accursed,
 A second son was born, to steal the love
 Which fate had else scarce rifled: he became
 My parents' hope, the darling of the crew
 Who lived upon their smiles, and thought it flattery
 To trace in every foible of my youth—
 A prince's youth!—the workings of the curse;
 My very mother—Jove! I cannot bear
 To speak it now—look'd freezingly upon me!

ION.

But thy brother—

ADRASTUS.

Died. Thou hast heard the lie,
 The common lie that every peasant tells
 Of me his master,—that I slew the boy.
 'Tis false! One summer's eve, below a crag
 Which, in his wilful mood, he strove to climb,
 He lay a mangled corpse: the very slaves,

Whose cruelty had shut him from my heart,
Now coin'd their own injustice into proofs
To brand me as his murderer.

ION.

Did they dare
Accuse thee ?

ADRASTUS.

Not in open speech :—they felt
I should have seized the miscreant by the throat,
And crush'd the lie half spoken with the life
Of the base speaker ;—but the tale look'd out
From the stolen gaze of coward eyes, which shrank
When mine have met them ; murmur'd through the crowd
That at the sacrifice, or feast, or game,
Stood distant from me ; burnt into my soul
When I beheld it in my father's shudder !

ION.

Didst not declare thy innocence ?

ADRASTUS.

To whom ?

To parents who could doubt me ? To the ring
Of grave impostors, or their shallow sons,
Who should have studied to prevent my wish
Before it grew to language ; hail'd my choice
To service as a prize to wrestle for ;
And whose reluctant courtesy I bore,
Pale with proud anger, till from lips compress'd
The blood has started ? To the common herd,
The vassals of our ancient house, the mass

Of bones and muscles framed to till the soil
 A few brief years, then rot unnamed beneath it,
 Or, deck'd for slaughter at their master's call,
 To smite and to be smitten, and lie crush'd
 In heaps to swell his glory or his shame?
 Answer to them: No! though my heart had burst,
 As it was nigh to bursting!—To the mountains
 I fled, and on their pinnacles of snow
 Breasted the icy wind, in hope to cool
 My spirit's fever—struggled with the oak
 In search of weariness, and learn'd to rive
 Its stubborn boughs, till limbs once lightly strung
 Might mate in cordage with its infant stems;
 Or on the sea-beat rock tore off the vest
 Which burnt upon my bosom, and to air
 Headlong committed, clove the water's depth
 Which plummet never sounded;—but in vain.

ION.

Yet succour came to thee?

ADRASTUS.

A blessed one!

Which the strange magic of thy voice revives,
 And thus unlocks my soul. My rapid steps
 Were in a wood-encircled valley stay'd
 By the bright vision of a maid, whose face
 Most lovely more than loveliness reveal'd,
 In touch of patient grief, which dearer seem'd
 Than happiness to spirit sear'd like mine.
 With feeble hands she strove to lay in earth

The body of her aged sire, whose death
Left her alone. I aided her sad work,
And soon too lonely ones by holy rites
Became one happy being. Days, weeks, months,
In streamlike unity flow'd silent by us
In our delightful nest. My father's spies—
Slaves, whom my nod should have consign'd to stripes
Or the swift falchion—track'd our sylvan home
Just as my bosom knew its second joy,
And, spite of fortune, I embraced a son.

ION.

Urged by thy trembling parents to avert
That dreadful prophecy?

ADRASTUS.

Fools! did they deem
Its worst accomplishment could match the ill
Which they wrought on me? It had left unharm'd
A thousand ecstasies of passion'd years,
Which, tasted once, live ever, and disdain
Fate's iron grapple! Could I now behold
That son with knife uplifted at my heart,
A moment ere my life-blood follow'd it,
I would embrace him with my dying eyes,
And pardon destiny! While jocund smiles
Wreathed on the infant's face, as if sweet spirits
Suggested pleasant fancies to its soul,
The ruffians broke upon us; seized the child;
Dash'd through the thicket to the beetling rock
'Neath which the deep wave eddies: I stood still

As stricken into stone: I heard him cry,
 Press'd by the rudeness of the murderer's gripe,
 Severer ill unfearing—then the splash
 Of waters that shall cover him for ever;
 And could not stir to save him!

ION.

And the mother—

ADRASTUS.

She spake no word, but clasp'd me in her arms,
 And lay her down to die. A lingering gaze
 Of love she fixed on me—none other loved,
 And so pass'd hence. By Jupiter, her look!
 Her dying patience glimmers in thy face!
 She lives again! She looks upon me now!
 There 's magic in 't. Bear with me—I am childish.

Enter CRYTHES and Guards.

ADRASTUS.

Why art thou here?

CRYTHES.

The dial points the hour.

ADRASTUS.

Dost thou not see that horrid purpose pass'd?
 Hast thou no heart—no sense?

CRYTHES.

Scarce half an hour
 Hath flown since the command on which I wait.

ADRASTUS.

Scarce half an hour!—years—years have roll'd since then.

Begone! remove that pageantry of death—
 It blasts my sight—and hearken! Touch a hair
 Of this brave youth, or look on him as now
 With thy cold headsman's eye, and yonder band
 Shall not expect a fearful show in vain.

Hence without word.

[*Exit* CRYTHES.]

What wouldst thou have me do?

ION.

Let thy awaken'd heart speak its own language;
 Convene thy Sages;—frankly, nobly meet them;
 Explore with them the pleasure of the gods,
 And, whatso'er the sacrifice, perform it.

ADRASTUS.

Well! I will seek their presence in an hour;
 Go summon them, young hero: hold! no word
 Of the strange passion thou hast witness'd here.

ION.

Distrust me not.—Benignant Powers, I thank ye! [*Exit.*

ADRASTUS.

Yet stay—he's gone—his spell is on me yet;
 What have I promised him? To meet the men
 Who from my living head would strip the crown
 And sit in judgment on me?—I must do it—
 Yet shall my band be ready to o'erawe
 The course of liberal speech, and, if it rise
 So as too loudly to offend my ear,
 Strike the rash brawler dead!—What idle dream
 Of long-past days had melted me? It fades—
 It vanishes—I am again a king!

SCENE II.

The Interior of the Temple.

[Same as ACT I. SCENE I.]

[CLEMANTHE seated—ABRA attending her.]

ABRA.

Look, dearest lady!—the thin smoke aspires
 In the calm air, as when in happier times
 It show'd the gods propitious; wilt thou seek
 Thy chamber, lest thy father and his friends,
 Returning, find us hinderers of their council?
 She answers not—she hearkens not—with joy
 Could I believe her, for the first time, sullen!
 Still she is rapt.

[Enter AGENOR.]

O speak to my sweet mistress;
 Haply thy voice may rouse her.

AGENOR.

Dear Clemanthe,
 Hope dawns in every omen; we shall hail
 Our tranquil hours again.

Enter MEDON, CLEON, TIMOCLES, and others.

MEDON.

Clemanthe here!
 How sad! how pale!

ABRA.

Her eye is kindling—hush !

CLEMANTHE.

Hark ! hear ye not a distant footstep ?

MEDON.

No.

Look round, my fairest child ; thy friends are near thee.

CLEMANTHE.

Yes !—now 'tis lost—'tis on that endless stair—

Nearer and more distinct—'tis his—'tis his—

He lives ! he comes !

[CLEMANTHE rises and rushes to the back of the stage,
at which ION appears, and returns with her.]

Here is your messenger,

Whom Heaven has rescued from the tyrant's rage

Ye sent him forth to brave. Rejoice, old men,

That ye are guiltless of his blood !—why pause ye ?

Why shout ye not his welcome ?

MEDON.

Dearest girl,

This is no scene for thee ; go to thy chamber ;

I 'll come to thee ere long.

[*Exeunt* CLEMANTHE and ABRA.]

She is o'erwrought

By fear and joy for one whose infant hopes

Were mingled with her own, even as a brother's.

TIMOCLES.

Ion !

How shall we do thee honor ?

ION.

None is due

Save to the gods whose gracious influence sways
 The king ye deem'd relentless ;—he consents
 To meet ye presently in council :—speed ;
 This may be nature's latest rally in him,
 In fitful strength, ere it be quench'd for ever !

MEDON.

Haste to your seats ; I will but speak a word
 With our brave friend, and follow : though convened
 In speed, let our assembly lack no forms
 Of due observance, which to furious power
 Plead with the silent emphasis of years.

[*Exeunt all but MEDON and ION.*

Ion, draw near me ; this eventful day
 Hath shown thy nature's graces circled round
 With firmness which accomplishes the hero ;—
 And it would bring to me but one proud thought—
 That virtues which required not culture's aid
 Shed their first fragrance 'neath my roof, and there
 Found shelter ;—but it also hath reveal'd
 What I may not hide from thee, that my child,
 My blithe and innocent girl—more fair in soul,
 More delicate in fancy than in mould—
 Loves thee with other than a sister's love.
 I should have cared for this : I vainly deem'd
 A fellowship in childhood's thousand joys
 And household memories had nurtured friendship
 Which might hold blameless empire in the soul ;

But in that guise the traitor hath stolen in,
And the fair citadel is thine.

ION.

'Tis true.

I did not think the nurseling of thy house
Could thus disturb its holiest inmate's duty
With tale of selfish passion ;—but we met
As playmates who might never meet again,
And then the hidden truth flash'd forth, and show'd
To each the image in the other's soul
In one bright instant.

MEDON.

Be that instant blest

Which made thee truly ours. My son! my son!
'Tis we should feel uplifted, for the seal
Of greatness is upon thee ; yet I know
That when the gods, won by thy virtues, draw
The veil which now conceals their lofty birthplace,
Thou wilt not spurn the maid who prized them lowly.

ION.

Spurn her ! My father !

Enter CTESIPHON.

MEDON.

Ctesiphon!—and breathless—
Art come to chide me to the council ?

CTESIPHON.

No ;

To bring unwonted joy ; thy son approaches.

How fares thy father ?

ION. [*to PHOCION.*]

Do not speak of him.

CTESIPHON. [*overhearing ION.*]

Not speak of him ! Dost think there is a moment
When common things eclipse the burning thought
Of him and vengeance ?

PHOCION.

Has the tyrant's sword—

CTESIPHON.

No, Phocion ; that were merciful and brave,
Compared to his base deed ; yet will I tell it
To make the flashing of thine eye more deadly,
And edge thy words that they may rive his heartstrings.
The last time that Adrastus dared to face
The Sages of the state, although my father,
Yielding to nature's mild decay, had left
All worldly toil and hope, he gathered strength,
In his old seat, to speak one word of warning.
Thou know'st how bland with years his wisdom grew,
And with what phrases, steep'd in love, he sheath'd
The sharpness of rebuke ; yet, ere his speech
Was closed, the tyrant started from his throne,
And with his base hand smote him ;—'twas his death-
stroke !

The old man totter'd home, and only once
Raised his head after.

PHOCION.

Thou wert absent ? Yes !

The royal miscreant lives !

CTESIPHON.

Had I beheld
That sacrilege, the tyrant had lain dead,
Or I had been torn piecemeal by his minions.
But I was far away : when I return'd,
I found my father on the nearest bench
Within our door, his thinly silver'd head
Supported by wan hands, which hid his face
And would not be withdrawn ;—no groan, no sigh
Was audible, and we might only learn
By short convulsive tremblings of his frame
That life still flicker'd in it—yet at last,
By some unearthly inspiration roused,
He dropp'd his wither'd hands, and sat erect
As in his manhood's glory—the free blood
Flush'd crimson through his cheeks, his furrow'd brow
Expanded clear, and his eyes opening full
Gleam'd with a youthful fire ;—I fell in awe
Upon my knees before him—still he spake not,
But slowly raised his arm untrembling ; clench'd
His hand as if it grasp'd an airy knife,
And struck in air : my hand was joined with his
In nervous grasp—my lifted eye met his
In steadfast gaze—my pressure answer'd his—
We knew at once each other's thought ; a smile
Of the old sweetness play'd upon his lips,
And life forsook him. Weaponless I flew
To seek the tyrant, and was driven with scoffs

From the proud gates which shelter him. He lives—
And I am here to babble of revenge!

PHOCION.

It comes, my friend—haste with me to the king!

ION.

Even while we speak, Adrastus meets his council;
There let us seek him: should ye find him touch'd
With penitence, as happily ye may,
O give allowance to his soften'd nature!

CTESIPHON.

Show grace to him!—Dost dare?—I had forgot,
Thou dost not know how a son loves a father!

ION.

I know enough to feel for thee; I know
Thou hast endured the vilest wrong that tyranny
In its worst frenzy can inflict;—yet think,
O think! before the irrevocable deed
Shuts out all thought, how much of power's excess
Is theirs who raise the idol:—do we groan
Beneath the personal force of this rash man,
Who forty summers since hung at the breast
A playful weakling; whom the heat unnerves,
The north wind pierces; and the hand of death
May, in a moment, change to clay as vile
As that of the scourged slave whose chains it severs?
No! 'tis our weakness gasping, or the shows
Of outward strength that builds up tyranny,
And makes it look so glorious:—If we shrink
Faint-hearted from the reckoning of our span

Of mortal days, we pamper the fond wish
 For long duration in a line of kings :
 If the rich pageantry of thoughts must fade
 All unsubstantial as the regal hues
 Of eve which purpled them, our cunning frailty
 Must robe a living image with their pomp,
 And wreath a diadem around its brow,
 In which our sunny fantasies may live
 Empearl'd, and gleam, in fatal splendour, far
 On after ages. We must look *within*
 For that which makes us slaves ;—on sympathies
 Which find no kindred objects in the plain
 Of common life—affections that aspire
 In air too thin—and fancy's dewy film
 Floating for rest ; for even such delicate threads,
 Gather'd by fate's engrossing hand, supply
 The eternal spindle whence she weaves the bond
 Of cable strength in which our nature struggles !

CTESIPHON.

Go talk to others, if thou wilt ;—to me
 All argument, save that of steel, is idle.

MEDON.

No more ;—let 's to the council—there, my son,
 Tell thy great message nobly ;—and for thee,
 Poor orphan'd youth, be sure the gods are just !

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.

The great Square of the City. ADRASTUS seated on a throne; AGENOR, TIMOCLES, CLEON, and others, seated as Councillors—Soldiers line the stage at a distance.

ADRASTUS.

Upon your summons, Sages, I am here ;
Your king attends to know your pleasure ; speak it !

AGENOR.

And canst thou ask ? If the heart dead within thee
Receives no impress of this awful time,
Art thou of sense forsaken ? Are thine ears
So charm'd by strains of slavish minstrelsy
That the dull groan and frenzy-pointed shriek
Pass them unheard to Heaven ? Or are thine eyes
So conversant with prodigies of grief,
They cease to dazzle at them ? Art thou arm'd
'Gainst wonder, while, in all things, Nature turns
To dreadful contraries ;—while Youth's full cheek
Is shrivell'd into furrows of sad years,
And 'neath its glossy curls untinged by care
Looks out a keen anatomy ;—while Age
Is stung by feverish torture for an hour
Into youth's strength ; while fragile Womanhood
Starts into frightful courage, all unlike
The gentle strength its gentle weakness feeds
To make affliction beautiful, and stalks

Abroad, a tearless, an unshuddering thing ;—
 While Childhood, in its orphan'd freedom blithe,
 Finds, in the shapes of wretchedness which seem
 Grotesque to its unsadden'd vision, cause
 For dreadful mirth that shortly shall be hush'd
 In never-broken silence ; and while Love,
 Immortal through all change, makes ghastly Death
 Its idol, and with furious passion digs
 Amid sepulchral images for gauds
 To cheat its fancy with ?—Do sights like these
 Glare through the realm thou shouldst be parent to,
 And canst thou find the voice to ask “our pleasure ?”

ADRASTUS.

Cease, babbler ;—wherefore would ye stun my ears
 With vain recital of the griefs I know,
 And cannot heal ?—will treason turn aside
 The shafts of fate, or medicine Nature's ills ?
 I have no skill in pharmacy, nor power
 To sway the elements.

AGENOR.

Thou hast the power
 To cast thyself upon the earth with us
 In penitential shame ; or, if this power
 Hath left a heart made weak by luxury
 And hard by pride, thou hast at least the power
 To cease the mockery of thy frantic revels.

ADRASTUS.

I have yet power to punish insult—look
 I use it not, Agenor !—Fate may dash

My sceptre from me, but shall not command
My will to hold it with a feebler grasp ;
Nay, if few hours of empire yet are mine,
They shall be colour'd with a sterner pride,
And peopled with more lustrous joys than flush'd
In the serene procession of its greatness,
Which look'd perpetual, as the flowing course
Of human things. Have ye beheld a pine
That clasp'd the mountain-summit with a root
As firm as its rough marble, and, apart
From the huge shade of undistinguish'd trees,
Lifted its head as in delight to share
The evening glories of the sky, and taste
The wanton dalliance of the heavenly breeze
That no ignoble vapour from the vale
Could mingle with—smit by the flaming marl,
And lighted for destruction ? How it stood
One glorious moment, fringed and wreathed with fire
Which show'd the inward graces of its shape,
Uncumber'd now, and midst its topmost boughs,
That young Ambition's airy fancies made
Their giddy nest, leap'd sportive ;—never clad
By liberal summer in a pomp so rich
As waited on its downfall, while it took
The storm-cloud roll'd behind it for a curtain
To gird its splendours round, and made the blast
Its minister to whirl its flashing shreds
Aloft towards heaven, or to the startled depths
Of forests that afar might share its doom !

So shall the royalty of Argos pass
In festal blaze to darkness! Have ye spoken?

AGENOR.

I speak no more to thee!—Great Jove, look down!

[*Shouting without.*]

ADRASTUS.

What factious brawl is this?—disperse it, soldiers.

[*Shouting renewed—As some of the soldiers are about to march, PHOCION rushes in, followed by CTESIPHON, ION, and MEDON.*]

Whence is this insolent intrusion?

PHOCION.

King!

I bear Apollo's answer to thy prayer.

ADRASTUS.

Has not thy travel taught thy knee its duty?

Here we had school'd thee better.

PHOCION.

Kneel to thee!

MEDON.

Patience, my son! Do homage to the king.

PHOCION.

Never!—thou talk'st of schooling—know, Adrastus,
That I have studied in a nobler school
Than the dull haunt of venal sophistry
Or the lewd guard-room;—o'er which ancient heaven
Extends its arch for all, and mocks the span
Of palaces and dungeons; where the heart
In its free beatings, 'neath the coarsest vest,

Claims kindred with diviner things than power
 Of kings can raise or stifle—in the school
 Of mighty Nature—where I learn'd to blush
 At sight like this, of thousands basely hush'd
 Before a man no mightier than themselves,
 Save in the absence of that love that softens.

ADRASTUS.

Peace! speak thy message.

PHOCION.

Shall I tell it here?

Or shall I seek thy couch at dead of night,
 And breathe it in low whispers?—As thou wilt.

ADRASTUS.

Here—and this instant!

PHOCION.

Hearken then, Adrastus,
 And hearken, Argives—thus Apollo speaks:—

[*Reads a scroll.*]

“ Argos ne'er shall find release

“ Till her monarch's race shall cease.”

ADRASTUS.

'Tis not God's will, but man's sedition speaks:—
 Guards! tear that lying parchment from his hands,
 And bear him to the palace.

MEDON.

Touch him not,—

He is Apollo's messenger, whose lips
 Were never stain'd with falsehood.

PHOCION.

Come on, all!

AGENOR.

Surround him, friends! Die with him!

ADRASTUS.

Soldiers, charge

Upon these rebels; hew them down. On, on!

The soldiers advance and surround the people; they seize PHOCION. ION rushes from the back of the stage, and throws himself between ADRASTUS and PHOCION.

PHOCION to ADRASTUS.

Yet I defy thee.

ION.

[*To PHOCION.*] Friend! for sake of all,
Enrage him not—wait while I speak a word—

[*To ADRASTUS.*] My sovereign, I implore thee, do not
stain

This sacred place with blood; in Heaven's great name
I do conjure thee—and in *hers*, whose spirit
Is mourning for thee now!

ADRASTUS.

Release the stripling—

Let him go spread his treason where he will:
He is not worth my anger. To the palace!

ION.

Nay, yet an instant!—let my speech have power
From Heaven to move thee further: thou hast heard
The sentence of the god, and thy heart owns it;

If thou wilt cast aside this cumbrous pomp,
 And in seclusion purify thy soul
 Long fever'd and sophisticate, the gods
 May give thee space for penitential thoughts:
 If not—as surely as thou standest here,
 Wilt thou lie stiff and weltering in thy blood.—
 The vision presses on me now.

ADRASTUS.

Art mad?

Resign thy state? Sue to the gods for life,
 The common life which every slave endures,
 And meanly clings to? No; within yon walls
 I shall resume the banquet, never more
 Broken by man's intrusion. Councillors,
 Farewell!—go mutter treason till ye perish!

[*Exeunt ADRASTUS, CRYTHES, and Soldiers.*]

ION, *who stands apart leaning on a pedestal.*

'Tis seal'd!

MEDON.

Let us withdraw, and strive
 By sacrifice to pacify the gods!

MEDON, AGENOR, and Councillors retire: they leave
 CTESIPHON, PHOCION, and ION. ION still stands
 apart, as wrapt in meditation.

CTESIPHON.

'Tis well; the measure of his guilt is fill'd.
 Where shall we meet at sunset?

PHOCION.

In the grove,

Which with its matted shade imbrowns the vale,
 Between those buttresses of rock that guard
 The sacred mountain on its western side,
 Stands a rude altar—overgrown with moss,
 And stain'd with drippings of a million showers,
 So old, that no tradition names the power
 That hallow'd it,—which we will consecrate
 Anew to freedom and to justice.

CTESIPHON.

Thither

Will I bring friends to meet thee. Shall we speak
 To yon rapt youth? [pointing to ION.]

PHOCION.

His nature is too gentle.

At sunset we will meet.—With arms?

CTESIPHON.

A knife—

One sacrificial knife will serve.

PHOCION.

At sunset!

[*Exeunt CTESIPHON and PHOCION severally.*

ION comes forward.

ION.

O wretched man, thy words have seal'd thy doom!
 Why should I shiver at it, when no way,
 Save this, remains to break the ponderous cloud
 That hangs above my wretched country?—death—
 A single death, the common lot of all,
 Which it will not be mine to look upon,—

And yet its ghastly shape dilates before me ;
I cannot shut it out ; my thoughts grow rigid,
And as that grim and prostrate figure haunts them,
My sinews stiffen like it. Courage, Ion !
No spectral form is here ; all outward things
Wear their own old familiar looks ; no dye
Pollutes them. Yet the air has scent of blood,
And now it eddies with a hurtling sound,
As if some weapon swiftly clove it. No—
The falchion's course is silent as the grave
That yawns before its victim. Gracious powers !
If the great duty of my life be near,
Grant it may be to suffer, not to strike !

[*Exit.*

END OF ACT II.

A C T I I I.

SCENE I.

A Terrace of the Temple.

CLEMANTHE, ION.

CLEMANTHE.

NAY, I must chide this sorrow from thy brow,
 Or 'twill rebuke my happiness ;—I know
 Too well the miseries that hem us round ;
 And yet the inward sunshine of my soul,
 Unclouded by their melancholy shadows,
 Bathes in its deep tranquillity one image—
 One only image, which no outward storm
 Can ever ruffle. Let me wean thee, then,
 From this vain pondering o'er the general woe,
 Which makes my joy look ugly.

ION.

No, my fair one,
 The gloom that wrongs thy love is unredcem'd
 By generous sense of others' woe : too sure
 It rises from dark presages within,
 And will not from me.

CLEMANTHE.

Then it is most groundless !
Hast thou not won the blessings of the perishing
By constancy, the fame of which shall live
While a heart beats in Argos ?—hast thou not
Upon one agitated bosom pour'd
The sweetest peace ? and can thy generous nature,
While it thus sheds felicity around it,
Remain itself unblest'd ?

ION.

I strove awhile
To think the assured possession of thy love
With too divine a burthen weigh'd my heart
And press'd my spirits down ;—but 'tis not so ;
Nor will I with false tenderness beguile thee,
By feigning that my sadness has a cause
So exquisite. Clemanthe ! thou wilt find me
A sad companion ;—I who knew not life,
Save as the sportive breath of happiness,
Now feel my minutes teeming, as they rise,
With grave experiences ; I dream no more
Of azure realms where restless beauty sports
In myriad shapes fantastic ; dismal vaults
In black succession open till the gloom
Afar is broken by a streak of fire
That shapes my name—the fearful wind that moans
Before the storm articulates its sound ;
And as I pass'd but now the solemn range
Of Argive monarchs, that in sculptured mockery

Of present empire sit, their eyes of stone
 Bent on me instinct with a frightful life
 That drew me into fellowship with them,
 As conscious marble; while their ponderous lips—
 Fit organs of eternity—unclosed,
 And, as I live to tell thee, murmur'd "Hail!
 Hail! ION THE DEVOTED!"

CLEMANTHE.

These are fancies,
 Which thy soul, late expanded with great purpose,
 Shapes, as it quivers to its natural circle
 In which its joys should lurk, as in the bud
 The cells of fragrance cluster. Bid them from thee,
 And strive to be thyself.

ION.

I will do so!
 I'll gaze upon thy loveliness, and drink
 Its quiet in;—how beautiful thou art!—
 My pulse throbs now as it was wont;—a being,
 Which owns so fair a glass to mirror it,
 Cannot show darkly.

CLEMANTHE.

We shall soon be happy;
 My father will rejoice to bless our love,
 And Argos waken;—for her tyrant's course
 Must have a speedy end.

ION.

It must! It must!

CLEMANTHE.

Yes; for no empty talk of public wrongs
Assails him now; keen hatred and revenge
Are roused to crush him.

ION.

Not by such base agents

May the august lustration be achieved:

He who shall cleanse his country from the guilt
For which Heaven smites her, should be pure of soul,
Guileless as infancy, and undisturb'd
By personal anger as thy father is,
When, with unswerving hand and piteous eye,
He stops the brief life of the innocent kid
Bound with white fillets to the altar;—so
Enwreathed by fate the royal victim heaves,
And soon his breast shall shrink beneath the knife
Of the selected slayer!

CLEMANTHE.

'Tis thyself

Whom thy strange language pictures—Ion! thou—

ION.

She has said it! Her pure lips have spoken out
What all things intimate;—didst thou not mark
Me for the office of avenger—*me*?

CLEMANTHE.

No;—save from the wild picture that thy fancy—
Thy o'erwrought fancy drew; I thought it look'd
Too like thee, and I shudder'd.

ION.

So do I!

And yet I almost wish I shudder'd more,
For the dire thought has grown familiar with me—
Could I escape it!

CLEMANTHE.

'Twill away in sleep.

ION.

No, no! I dare not sleep—for well I know
That then the knife will gleam, the blood will gush,
The form will stiffen!—I will walk awhile
In the sweet evening light, and try to chase
These fearful images away.

CLEMANTHE.

Let me

Go with thee. O, how often hand in hand
In such a lovely light have we roam'd westward
Aimless and blessed, when we were no more
Than playmates:—surely we are not grown stranger
Since yesterday!

ION.

No, dearest, not to-night:

The plague yet rages fiercely in the vale,
And I am placed in grave commission here
To watch the gates;—indeed thou must not pass;
I will be merrier when we meet again,—
Trust me, my love, I will; farewell!

[Exit ION.]

CLEMANTHE.

Farewell then!

How fearful disproportion shows in one
Whose life hath been all harmony ! He bends
Towards that thick covert where in blessed hour
My father found him, which has ever been
His chosen place of musing. Shall I follow ?
Am I already grown a selfish mistress,
To watch his solitude with jealous eye,
And claim him all ? That let me never be—
Yet danger from within besets him now,
Known to me only—I will follow him !

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

An opening in a deep wood—in front an old grey altar.

Enter ION.

ION.

O winding pathways, o'er whose scanty blades
Of unaspiring grass mine eyes have bent
So often when by musing fancy sway'd,
That craved alliance with no wider scene
Than your fair thickets border'd, but was pleased
To deem the toilsome years of manhood flown,
And, on the pictured mellowness of age
Idly reflective, image my return
From careful wanderings, to find ye gleam
With unchanged aspect on a heart unchanged,
And melt the busy past to a sweet dream

As then the future was ;—why should ye now
 Echo my steps with melancholy sound
 As ye were conscious of a guilty presence ?
 The lovely light of eve, that, as it waned,
 Touch'd ye with softer, homelier look, now fades
 In dismal blackness ; and yon twisted roots
 Of ancient trees, with whose fantastic forms
 My thoughts grew humorous, look terrible,
 As if about to start to serpent life,
 And hiss around me ;—whither shall I turn ?—
 Where fly ?—I see the myrtle-cradled spot
 Where human love instructed by divine
 Found and embraced me first ; I 'll cast me down
 Upon that earth as on a mother's breast,
 In hope to feel myself again a child.

[ION goes into the wood.]

Enter CTESIPHON, CASSANDER, and other Argive youths.

CTESIPHON.

Sure this must be the place that Phocion spoke of ;—
 The twilight deepens, yet he does not come.
 O, if, instead of idle dreams of freedom,
 He knew the sharpness of a grief like mine,
 He would not linger thus !

CASSANDER.

The sun's broad disk
 Of misty red, a few brief minutes since,
 Sank 'neath the leaden wave ; but night steals on
 With rapid pace to veil us, and thy thoughts

'Are eager as the favouring darkness.

Enter PHOCION.

CTESIPHON.

Welcome!

Thou know'st all here.

PHOCION.

Yes; I rejoice, Cassander,

To find thee my companion in a deed
Worthy of all the dreamings of old days,
When we, two rebel youths, grew safely brave
In visionary perils. We'll not shame
Our young imaginations. Ctesiphon,
We look to thee for guidance in our aim.

CTESIPHON.

I bring you glorious news. There is a soldier,
Who, in his reckless boyhood, was my comrade,
And though by taste of luxury subdued
Even to brook the tyrant's service, burns
With generous anger to avenge that grief
I bear above all others. He has made
The retribution sure. From him I learnt
That when Adrastus reach'd his palace court,
He paused, to struggle with some mighty throe
Of passion; then call'd eagerly for wine,
And bade his soldiers share his choicest stores,
And snatch, like him, a day from Fortune. Soon,
As one worn out by watching and excess,
He stagger'd to his couch, where now he lies

Oppress'd with heavy sleep, while his loose soldiers,
Made by the fierce carousal vainly mad
Or grossly dull, are scatter'd through the courts
Unarm'd and cautionless. The eastern portal
Is at this moment open; by that gate
We all may enter unperceived, and line
The passages which gird the royal chamber,
While one blest hand within completes the doom
Which Heaven pronounces. Nothing now remains,
But that as all would share this action's glory,
We join in one great vow, and choose one arm
Our common minister. Oh, if these sorrows
Confer on me the office to return
Upon the tyrant's shivering heart the blow
Which crush'd my father's spirit, I will leave
To him who cares for toys the patriot's laurel
And the applause of ages!

PHOCION.

Let the gods
By the old course of lot reveal the name
Of the predestined champion. For myself,
Here do I solemnly devote all powers
Of soul and body to that glorious purpose
We live but to fulfil.

CTESIPHON.

And I!

CASSANDER.

And I!

ION.

[*Who has advanced from the wood, rushes to the altar,
and exclaims*]

And I!

PHOCION.

Most welcome! The serenest powers of justice,
In prompting thy unspotted soul to join
Our bloody councils, sanctify and bless them!

ION.

The gods have prompted me; for they have given
One dreadful voice to all things which should be
Else dumb or musical: and I rejoice
To step from the grim round of waking dreams
Into this fellowship which makes all clear.
Wilt trust me, Ctesiphon?

CTESIPHON.

Yes; but we waste
The precious minutes in vain talk: if lots
Must guide us, have ye scrolls?

PHOCION.

Cassander has them:
The flickering light of yonder glade will serve him
To inscribe them with our names. Be quick, Cassander!

CTESIPHON.

I wear a casque, beneath whose iron circlet
My father's dark hairs whiten'd; let it hold
The names of his avengers!

[*CTESIPHON takes off his helmet and gives it to CASSANDER,
who retires with it.*]

PHOCION [*to CTESIPHON.*]

He whose name
Thou shalt draw first shall fill the post of glory.
Were it not also well, the second name
Should designate another charged to take
The same great office, if the first should leave
His work imperfect?

CTESIPHON.

There can scarce be need ;
Yet as thou wilt. May the first chance be mine !
I will leave little for a second arm.

[*CASSANDER returns with the helmet.*]

CTESIPHON.

Now, gods, decide !

[*CTESIPHON draws a lot from the helmet.*]

PHOCION.

The name? Why dost thou pause?

CTESIPHON.

'Tis Ion !

ION.

Well I knew it would be mine !

[*CTESIPHON draws another lot.*]

CTESIPHON.

Phocion ! it will be thine to strike *him* dead
If he should prove faint-hearted.

PHOCION.

With my life

I 'll answer for his constancy.

CTESIPHON [*to ION.*]

Thy hand !

'Tis cold as death.

ION.

Yes ; but it is as firm.

What ceremony next ?

[CTESIPHON *leads ION to the altar, and gives him a knife.*]

CTESIPHON.

Receive this steel,

For ages dedicate in my sad home
To sacrificial uses ; grasp it nobly,
And consecrate it to untrembling service
Against the king of Argos and his race.

ION.

His race ! Is he not left alone on earth ?
He hath no brother, and no child.

CTESIPHON.

Such words

The god hath used who never speaks in vain.

PHOCION.

There were old rumours of an infant born
And strangely vanishing ;—a tale of guilt
Half-hush'd, perchance distorted in the hushing,
And by the wise scarce heeded, for they deem'd it
One of a thousand guilty histories,
Which, if the walls of palaces could speak,
Would show that, nursed by prideful luxury,
To pamper which the virtuous peasant toils,
Crimes grow unpunish'd which the pirates' nest,

Or want's foul hovel, or the cell which justice
Keeps for unlicensed guilt, would startle at!
We must root out the stock, that no stray scion
Renew the tree, whose branches, stifling virtue,
Shed poison-dews on joy.

ION

[Approaches the altar, and, lifting up the knife, speaks]

Ye eldest gods,

Who in no statues of exactest form
Are palpable; who shun the azure heights
Of beautiful Olympus, and the sound
Of ever-young Apollo's minstrelsy;
Yet, mindful of the empire which ye held
Over dim Chaos, keep revengeful wrath
On falling nations, and on kingly lines
About to sink for ever; ye, who shed
Into the passions of earth's giant brood
And their fierce usages the sense of justice;
Who clothe the fated battlements of tyranny
With blackness as a funeral pall, and breathe
Through the proud halls of time-embolden'd guilt
Portents of ruin, hear me!—In your presence,
For now I feel ye nigh, I dedicate
This arm to the destruction of the king
And of his race! O keep me pitiless;
Expel all human weakness from my frame,
That this keen weapon shake not when his heart
Should feel its point; and if he has a child
Whose blood is needful to the sacrifice

My country asks, harden my soul to shed it!—
Was not that thunder?

CTESIPHON.

No; I heard no sound.

Now mark me, Ion!—thou shalt straight be led
To the king's chamber; we shall be at hand;
Nothing can give thee pause. Hold! one should watch
The city's eastern portal, lest the troops,
Returning from the work of plunder home,
Surround us unprepared. Be that thy duty.

[To PHOCION.

PHOCION.

I am to second Ion if he fail.

CTESIPHON.

He cannot fail;—I shall be nigh. What, Ion!

ION.

Who spake to me? Where am I? Friends, your pardon:
I am prepared; yet grant me for a moment,
One little moment, to be left alone.

CTESIPHON.

Be brief then, or the season of revenge
Will pass. At yonder thicket we'll expect thee.

[*Exeunt all but ION.*

ION.

Methinks I breathe more freely, now my lot
Is palpable, and mortals gird me round,
Though my soul owns no sympathy with theirs.
Some one approaches—I must hide this knife—
Hide! I have ne'er till now had aught to hide

From any human eye. [*He conceals the knife in his vest.*]

[*Enter CLEMANTHE.*]

Clemanthe here!

CLEMANTHE.

Forgive me that I break upon thee thus :
I meant to watch thy steps unseen ; but night
Is thickening ; thou art haunted by sad fancies,
And 'tis more terrible to think upon thee
Wandering with such companions in thy bosom,
Than in the peril thou art wont to seek
Beside the bed of death.

ION.

Death, sayst thou ? Death ?
Is it not righteous when the gods decree it ?
And brief its sharpest agony ? Yet, fairest,
It is no theme for thee. Go in at once,
And think of it no more.

CLEMANTHE.

Not without thee.
Indeed thou art not well ; thy hands are marble ;
Thine eyes are fix'd ; let me support thee, love :—
Ha ! what is that gleaming within thy vest ?
A knife ! Tell me its purpose, Ion !

ION.

No ;

My oath forbids.

CLEMANTHE.

An oath ! O gentle Ion,

What can have link'd thee to a cause which needs
 A stronger cement than a good man's word?
 There's danger in it. Wilt thou keep it from me?

ION.

Alas, I must. Thou wilt know all full soon—

[Voices call ION!]

Hark! I am call'd.

CLEMANTHE.

Nay, do not leave me thus.

ION.

'Tis very sad [*voices again*]—I dare not stay—farewell!

[Exit.]

CLEMANTHE.

It must be to Adrastus that he hastes!
 If by his hand the fated tyrant die,
 Austere remembrance of the deed will hang
 Upon his delicate spirit like a cloud,
 And tinge its world of happy images
 With hues of horror. Shall I to the palace,
 And, as the price of my disclosure, claim
 His safety? No!—'Tis never woman's part
 Out of her fond misgivings to perplex
 The fortunes of the man to whom she cleaves;
 'Tis hers to weave all that she has of fair
 And bright in the dark meshes of their web
 Inseparate from their windings. My poor heart
 Hath found its refuge in a hero's love,
 Whatever destiny his generous soul
 Shape for him;—'tis its duty to be still,
 And trust him till it bound or break with his.

[Exit.]

SCENE III.

A Chamber in the Temple.

Enter MEDON, followed by ABRA.

MEDON.

My daughter not within the temple, sayst thou?
Abroad at such an hour? Sure not alone
She wander'd: tell me truly, did not Phocion
Or Ion bear her company? 'twas Ion—
Confess;—was it not he? I shall not chide,
Indeed I shall not.

ABRA.

She went forth alone;
But it is true that Ion just before
Had taken the same path.

MEDON.

It was to meet him.
I would they were return'd; the night is grown
Of an unusual blackness. Some one comes—
Look if it be my daughter.

ABRA [*looking out.*]

No; young Irus,
The little slave, whose pretty tale of grief

Agenor, with so gracious a respect,
This morning told us.

MEDON.

Let him come ; he bears
Some message from his master.

Enter IRUS.

MEDON [*to IRUS.*]

Thou art pale :
Has any evil happen'd to Agenor ?

IRUS.

No, my good lord ; I do not come from him ;
I bear to thee a scroll from one who now
Is number'd with the dead ; he was my kinsman,
But I had never seen him till he lay
Upon his death-bed ; for he left these shores
Long before I was born, and no one knew
His place of exile ;—on this mournful day
He landed, was plague-stricken, and expired.
My gentle master gave me leave to tend
His else unsolaced death-bed ;—when he found
The clammy chilness of the grave steal on,
He call'd for parchment, and with trembling hand,
That seem'd to gather firmness from its task,
Wrote earnestly ; conjured me take the scroll
Instant to thee ; and died.

[*IRUS gives a scroll to MEDON.*]

MEDON [*reading the scroll.*]

These are high tidings.

Abra! is not Clemanthe come? I long
To tell her all.

Enter CLEMANTHE.

MEDON.

Sit down, my pensive child.

Abra, this boy is faint; see him refresh'd
With food and wine before thou lett'st him pass.

IRUS.

I have too long been absent from Agenor,
Who needs my slender help.

MEDON.

Nay, I will use
Thy master's firmness here, and use it so
As he would use it. Keep him prisoner, Abra,
Till he has done my bidding.

[*Exeunt ABRA and IRUS.*]

Now, Clemanthe,

Though thou hast play'd the truant and the rebel,
I will not be too strict in my award,
By keeping from thee news of one to thee
Most dear—nay, do not blush—I say most dear.

CLEMANTHE.

It is of Ion;—no—I do not blush,
But tremble. O my father, what of Ion?

MEDON.

How often have we guess'd his lineage noble !
And now 'tis proved. The kinsman of that youth
Was with another hired to murder him
A babe ;—they tore him from his mother's breast,
And to a sea-girt summit, where a rock
O'erhung a chasm, by the surge's force
Made terrible, rush'd with him. As the gods
In mercy order'd it, the foremost ruffian,
Who bore no burden, pressing through the gloom
In the wild hurry of his guilty purpose,
Trode at the extreme verge upon a crag
Loosen'd by summer from its granite bed,
And suddenly fell with it ;—with his fall
Sank the base daring of the man who held
The infant ; so he placed the unconscious babe
Upon the spot where it was found by me ;
Watch'd till he saw the infant safe ; then fled,
Fearful of question ; and return'd to die.
That child is Ion. Whom dost guess his sire ?—
The first in Argos.

CLEMANTHE.

Dost thou mean Adrastus ?

He cannot—must not—be that tyrant's son !

MEDON.

It is most certain. Nay, my thankless girl,
He hath no touch of his rash father's pride ;
For Nature, from whose genial lap he smiled
Upon us first, hath moulded for her own

The suppliant of her bounty ;—thou art bless'd ;
Thus, let me bid thee joy.

CLEMANTHE.

Joy, sayst thou—joy!

Then I must speak—he seeks Adrastus' life ;
And at this moment, while we talk, may stain
His soul with parricide.

MEDON.

Impossible !

Ion, the gentlest——

CLEMANTHE.

It is true, my father ;
I saw the weapon gleaming in his vest ;
I heard him call'd !

MEDON.

Shall I alarm the palace ?

CLEMANTHE.

No ; in the fierce confusion, he would fall
Before our tale could be its safeguard. Gods !
Is there no hope, no refuge ?

MEDON.

Yes, if Heaven

Assist us. I bethink me of a passage,
Which, fashion'd by a king in pious zeal,
That he might seek the altar of the god
In secret, from the temple's inmost shrine
Leads to the royal chamber. I have track'd it
In youth for pastime. Could I thread it now,
I yet might save him.

CLEMANTHE.

O, make haste, my father !

Shall I attend thee ?

MEDON.

No ; thou wouldst impede

My steps ;—thou art fainting ; when I have lodged thee safe

In thy own chamber, I will light the torch,

And instantly set forward.

CLEMANTHE.

Do not waste

An instant's space on me ; speed, speed, my father—

The fatal moments fly ; I need no aid ;—

Thou seest I am calm, quite calm.

MEDON.

The gods protect thee !

[Exeunt severally.]

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The Royal Chamber. ADRASTUS on a couch, asleep.

Enter ION with the knife.

ION.

Why do I creep thus stealthily along
 With trembling steps? Am I not arm'd by Heaven
 To executè its mandate on a king
 Whom it hath doom'd? And shall I falter now,
 While every moment that he breathes may crush
 Some life else happy?—Can I be deceived
 By some foul passion, crouching in my soul,
 Which takes a radiant form to lure me on?
 Assure me, gods!—Yes; I have heard your voices;
 For I dare pray ye now to nerve my arm
 And see me strike! *[He goes to the couch.*

He's smiling in his slumber,
 As if some happy thought of innocent days
 Play'd at his heart-strings: must I scare it thence
 With death's sharp agony? He lies condemn'd
 By the high judgment of supernal Powers,

And he shall know their sentence. Wake, Adrastus!
Collect thy spirits, and be strong to die!

ADRASTUS.

Who dares disturb my rest? Guards! Soldiers!
Recreants!

Where tarry ye? Why smite ye not to earth
This bold intruder?—Ha! no weapon here!—
What wouldst thou with me, ruffian?

[*Rising.*]

ION.

I am none,
But a sad instrument in Jove's great hand
To take thy life, long forfeited—Prepare!
Thy hour is come!

ADRASTUS.

Villains! does no one hear?

ION.

Vex not the closing minutes of thy being
With torturing hope or idle rage; thy guards,
Palsied with revelry, are scatter'd senseless,
While the most valiant of our Argive youths
Hold every passage by which human aid
Could reach thee. Present death is the award
Of Powers who watch above me while I stand
To execute their sentence.

ADRASTUS.

Thou!—I know thee—
The youth I spared this morning, in whose ear
I pour'd the secrets of my bosom. Kill me,
If thou dar'st do it; but bethink thee first

How the grim memory of thy thankless deed
Will haunt thee to the grave !

ION.

It is most true ;

Thou spar'dst my life, and therefore do the gods
Ordain me to this office, lest thy fall
Seem the chance forfeit of some single sin,
And not the great redress of Argos. Now—
Now, while I parley—Spirits that have left,
Within this hour, their plague-tormented flesh
To rot untomb'd, glide by, and frown on me,
Their slow avenger—and the chamber swarms
With looks of Furies—Yet a moment wait,
Ye dreadful prompters !—If there is a friend,
Whom dying thou wouldst greet by word or token,
Speak thy last bidding.

ADRASTUS.

I have none on earth.

If thou hast courage, end me !

ION.

Not one friend !

Most piteous doom !

ADRASTUS.

Art melted ?

ION.

If I am,

Hope nothing from my weakness ; mortal arms,
And eyes unseen that sleep not, gird us round,
And we shall fall together. Be it so !

ADRASTUS.

No; strike at once; my hour is come: in thee
I recognise the minister of Jove,
And, kneeling thus, submit me to his power.

[ADRASTUS *kneels.*]

ION.

Avert thy face!

ADRASTUS.

No; let me meet thy gaze;
For breathing pity lights thy features up
Into more awful likeness of a form
Which once shone on me;—and which now my sense
Shapes palpable—in habit of the grave,
Inviting me to the sad realm where shades
Of innocents, whom passionate regard
Link'd with the guilty, are content to pace
With them the margin of the inky flood
Mournful and calm;—'tis surely there;—she waves
Her pallid hand in circle o'er thy head,
As if to bless thee—and I bless thee too,
Death's gracious angel!—Do not turn away.

ION.

Gods! to what office have ye doom'd me!—Now!

[ION *raises his arm to stab ADRASTUS, who is kneeling, and gazes steadfastly upon him. The voice of MEDON is heard without, calling ION! ION!—ION drops his arm.*]

ADRASTUS.

Be quick, or thou art lost!

[As ION has again raised his arm to strike, MEDON rushes in behind him.]

MEDON.

Ion, forbear!

Behold thy son, Adrastus!

[ION stands for a moment stupified with horror, drops the knife, and falls senseless on the ground.]

ADRASTUS.

What strange words

Are these which call my senses from the death
They were composed to welcome? Son! 'tis false—
I had but one—and the deep wave rolls o'er him!

MEDON.

That wave received, instead of the fair nurseling,
One of the slaves who bore him from thy sight
In wicked haste to slay;—I'll give thee proofs.

ADRASTUS.

Great Jove, I thank thee!—raise him gently—proofs!
Are there not here the lineaments of her
Who made me happy once—the voice, now still,
That bade the long-seal'd fount of love gush out,
While with a prince's constancy he came
To lay his noble life down; and the sure,
The dreadful proof, that he whose guileless brow
Is instinct with her spirit, stood above me,
Arm'd for the traitor's deed?—It is my child!

[ION, reviving, sinks on one knee before ADRASTUS.]

ION.

Father!

[Noise without.]

MEDON.

The clang of arms !

ION. [*starting up.*]

They come ! they come !

They who are leagued with me against thy life.

Here let us fall !

ADRASTUS.

I will confront them yet.

Within I have a weapon which has drunk

A traitor's blood ere now ;—there will I wait them :

No power less strong than death shall part us now.

[*Exeunt ADRASTUS and ION as to an inner chamber.*]

MEDON.

Have mercy on him, gods, for the dear sake

Of your most single-hearted worshipper !

[*Enter CTESIPHON, CASSANDER, and others.*]

CTESIPHON.

What treachery is this—the tyrant fled,

And Ion fled too !—Comrades, stay this dotard,

While I search yonder chamber.

MEDON.

Spare him, friends,—

Spare him to clasp awhile his new-found son ;

Spare him as Ion's father !

CTESIPHON.

Father ! yes—

That is indeed a name to bid me spare ;—

Let me but find him, gods !

[*He rushes into the inner chamber.*]

MEDON [*to CASSANDER and the others.*]

Had ye but seen
What have I seen, ye would have mercy on him.

CRYTHES *enters with soldiers.*

Ha, soldiers! hasten to defend your master;
That way——

[*As CRYTHES is about to enter the inner chamber,
CTESIPHON rushes from it with a bloody dagger, and
stops them.*]

CTESIPHON.

It is accomplished; the foul blot
Is wiped away. Shade of my murder'd father,
Look on thy son, and smile!

CRYTHES.

Whose blood is that?

It cannot be the king's!

CTESIPHON.

It cannot be!

Think'st thou, foul minion of a tyrant's will,
He was to crush, and thou to crawl for ever?
Look there, and tremble!

CRYTHES.

Wretch! thy life shall pay
The forfeit of this deed.

[*CRYTHES and soldiers seize CTESIPHON.
Enter ADRASTUS mortally wounded, supported by ION.*]

ADRASTUS.

Here let me rest;
In this old chamber did my life begin,

And here I 'll end it : Crythes ! thou hast timed
Thy visit well, to bring thy soldiers hither
To gaze upon my parting.

CRYTHES.

To avenge thee ;—

Here is the traitor !

ADRASTUS.

Set him free at once :—

Why do ye not obey me ? Ctesiphon,
I gave thee cause for this ;—believe me now
That thy true steel has made thy vengeance sure ;
And as we now stand equal, I will sue
For a small boon—let me not see thee more.

CTESIPHON.

Farewell !

[*Exit* CTESIPHON.]

ADRASTUS [*to* CRYTHES *and the soldiers.*]

Why do ye tarry here ?

Begone !—still do ye hover round my couch ?
If the commandment of a dying king
Is feeble, as a man who has embraced
His child for the first time since infancy,
And presently must part with him for ever,
I do adjure ye leave us !

[*Exeunt all but* ION *and* ADRASTUS.]

ION.

O my father !

How is it with thee now ?

ADRASTUS.

Well ; very well ;—

Avenging Fate hath spent its utmost force
 Against me ; and I gaze upon my son
 With the sweet certainty that nought can part us
 Till all is quiet here. How like a dream
 Seems the succession of my regal pomps
 Since I embraced thy helplessness ! To *me*
 The interval hath been a weary one :
 How hath it pass'd with thee ?

ION.

But that my heart
 Hath sometimes ached for the sweet sense of kindred,
 I had enjoy'd a round of happy years
 As cherish'd youth e'er knew.

ADRASTUS.

I bless the gods
 That they have strewn along thy humble path
 Delights unblamed ; and in this hour I seem
 Even as I had lived so ; and I feel
 That I shall live in thee, unless that curse—
 Oh, if it should survive me !

ION.

Think not of it ;
 The gods have shed such sweetness in this moment,
 That, howsoe'er they deal with me hereafter,
 I shall not deem them angry. Let me call
 For help to stanch thy wound ; thou art strong yet,
 And yet may live to bless me.

ADRASTUS.

Do not stir ;

My strength is ebbing fast ; yet, as it leaves me,
 The spirit of my stainless days of love
 Awakens ; and their images of joy,
 Which at thy voice started from blank oblivion,
 When thou wert strange to me, and then half-shown
 Look'd sadly through the mist of guilty years,
 Now glimmer on me in the lovely light
 Which at thy age they wore. Thou art all thy mother's,
 Her elements of gentlest virtue cast
 In mould heroical.

ION.

Thy speech grows fainter ;
 Can I do nothing for thee ?

ADRASTUS.

Yes ;—my son,
 Thou art the best, the bravest, of a race
 Of rightful monarchs ; thou must mount the throne
 Thy ancestors have fill'd, and by great deeds
 Efface the memory of thy fated sire,
 And win the blessing of the gods for men
 Stricken for him. Swear to me thou wilt do this,
 And I shall die forgiven.

ION.

I will.

ADRASTUS.

Rejoice,
 Sufferers of Argos ! I am growing weak,
 And my eyes dazzle ; let me rest my hands,
 Ere they have lost their feeling, on thy head.—

So! So!—thy hair is glossy to the touch
 As when I last enwreath'd its tiny curl
 About my finger; I did image then
 Thy reign excelling mine; it is fulfill'd,
 And I die happy. Bless thee, King of Argos!

[Dies.]

ION.

He's dead! and I am fatherless again.—
 King did he hail me? shall I make that word
 A spell to bid old happiness awake
 Throughout the lovely land that father'd me
 In my forsaken childhood?

[He sees the knife on the ground, and takes it up.]

Most vain dream!

This austere monitor had bid thee vanish
 Ere half-reveal'd. Come back, thou truant steel;
 Half of thy work the gods absolved thee from—
 The rest remains! Lie there!

[He conceals the knife in his vest. Shouts heard without.]

The voice of joy!

Is this thy funeral wailing? O my father!
 Mournful and brief will be the heritage
 Thou leavest me; yet I promised thee in death
 To grasp it;—and I will embrace it now.

Enter AGENOR and others.

AGENOR.

Does the king live?

ION.

Alas! in me. The son
 Of him whose princely spirit is at rest,

Claims his ancestral honours.

AGENOR.

That high thought

Anticipates the prayer of Argos, roused
To sudden joy. The sages wait without
To greet thee : wilt confer with them to-night,
Or wait the morning ?

ION.

Now ;—the city's state
Allows the past no sorrow. I attend them.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Before the Gate of the City.

PHOCION *on guard.*

PHOCION.

Fool that I was to take this idle office
At most inglorious distance from the scene
Which shall be freedom's birth-place ; to endure
The phantasies of danger which the soul
Uncheer'd by action coldly dallies with
Till it begins to shiver ! Long ere this,
If Ion's hand be firm, the deed is past,
And yet no shout announces that the bonds
Of tyranny are broken.

[*Shouts at a distance.*]

Hark ! 'tis done !

Enter CTESIPHON.

All hail, my brother freeman!—art not so?—
Thy looks are haggard—is the tyrant slain?
Is liberty achieved?

CTESIPHON.

The king is dead;
This arm—I bless the righteous Furies!—slew him.

PHOCION.

Did Ion quail, then?

CTESIPHON.

Ion!—clothe thy speech
In phrase more courtly; he is king of Argos,
Accepted as the tyrant's son, and reigns.

PHOCION.

It cannot be; I can believe him born
Of such high lineage; yet he will not change
His own rich treasury of unruffled thoughts
For all the frigid glories that invest
The loveless state in which the monarch dwells
A terror and a slave. [*Shouts again.*

CTESIPHON.

Dost hear that shout?
'Tis raised for him!—the craven-hearted world
Is ever eager thus to hail a master,
And patriots smite for it in vain. Our Soldiers,
In the gay recklessness of men who sport
With life as with a plaything; Citizens
On wretched beds gaping for show; and Sages,
Vain of a royal sophist, madly join

In humble prayer that he would deign to tread
Upon their necks ; and he is pleased to grant it.

PHOCION.

He shall not grant it ! If my life, my sense,
My heart's affections, and my tongue's free scope
Wait the dominion of a mortal will,
What is the sound to me, whether my soul
Bears " Ion " or " Adrastus " burnt within it
As my soul's owner ? Ion tyrant ? No !
Grant me a moment's pleading with his heart,
Which has not known a selfish throb till now,
And thou shalt see him smile this greatness from him.

CTESIPHON.

Go teach the eagle when in azure heaven
He upward darts to seize his madden'd prey,
Shivering through the death-circle of its fear,
To pause and let it 'scape, and thou mayst win
Man to forego the sparkling round of power,
When it floats airily within his grasp !

PHOCION.

Why thus severe ? Our nature's common wrongs
Affect thee not ; and that which touch'd thee nearly
Is well avenged.

CTESIPHON.

Not while the son of him

Who smote my father reigns ! I little guess'd
Thou wouldst require a prompter to awake
The memory of the oath so freshly sworn,
Or of the place assign'd to thee by lot,

Should our first champion fail to crush the race—
 Mark me!—"the race" of him my arm has dealt with.
 Now is the time, the palace all confused,
 And the prince dizzy with strange turns of fortune,
 To do thy part.

PHOCION.

Have mercy on my weakness!
 If thou hadst known this comrade of my sports,
 One of the same small household whom his mirth
 Unfailing gladden'd;—if a thousand times
 Thou hadst, by strong prosperity made thoughtless,
 Touch'd its unfather'd nature in its nerve
 Of agony, and felt no chiding glance;—
 Hadst thou beheld him overtax his strength
 To serve the wish his genial instinct guess'd,
 Till his dim smile the weariness betray'd,
 Which it would fain dissemble; hadst thou known
 In sickness the sweet magic of his care,
 Thou couldst not ask it.—Hear me, Ctesiphon!—
 I had a deadly fever once, and slaves
 Fled me: he watch'd, and glided to my bed,
 And sooth'd my dull ear with discourse which grew
 By nice degrees to ravishment, till pain
 Seem'd an heroic sense, which made me kin
 To the great deeds he pictured, and the brood
 Of dizzy weakness flickering through the gloom
 Of my small curtain'd prison caught the hues
 Of beauty spangling out in glorious change;
 And it became a luxury to lie

And faintly listen. Canst thou bid me slay him?

CTESIPHON.

The deed be mine. Thou 'lt not betray me?

[*Going.*

PHOCION.

Hold!

If by our dreadful compact he must fall,
I will not smite him with my coward thought
Winging a distant arm; I will confront him
Arm'd with delicious memories of our youth,
And pierce him through them all.

CTESIPHON.

Be speedy, then!

PHOCION.

Fear not that I shall prove a laggard, charged
With weight of such a purpose.—Fate commands,
And I live now but to perform her bidding.

[*Exeunt severally.*

SCENE III.

A Terrace in the Garden of the Palace, by Moonlight.

Enter ION and AGENOR.

AGENOR.

Wilt thou not in to rest?

ION.

My rest is here—

Beneath the greatness of the heavens, which awes
 My spirit, toss'd by sudden change, and torn
 By various passions, to repose. Yet age
 Requires more genial nourishment—pray seek it—
 I will but stay thee to inquire once more
 If any symptom of returning health
 Bless the wan city ?

AGENOR.

No—the perishing
 Lift up their painful heads to bless thy name,
 And their eyes kindle as they utter it ;
 But still they perish.

ION.

So !—give instant order,
 The rites which shall confirm me in my throne
 Be solemnized to-morrow.

AGENOR.

How ! so soon,
 While the more sacred duties to the dead
 Remain unpaid ?

ION.

Let them abide my time—
 They will not tarry long. I see thee gaze
 With wonder on me—do my bidding now,
 And trust me till to morrow. Pray go in,
 The night will chill thee else.

AGENOR.

Farewell, my lord ! [*Exit.*]

ION.

Now all is stillness in my breast—how soon
To be displaced by more profound repose,
In which no thread of consciousness shall live
To feel how calm it is!—O lamp serene,
Do I lift up to thee undazzled eyes
For the last time? Shall I enjoy no more
Thy golden haziness which seem'd akin
To my young fortune's dim felicity?
And when it coldly shall embrace the urn
That shall contain my ashes, will no thought
Of all the sweet ones cherish'd by thy beams
Awake to tremble with them? Vain regret!
The pathway of my duty lies in sunlight,
And I would tread it with as firm a step,
Though it should terminate in cold oblivion,
As if Elysian pleasures at its close
Gleam'd palpable to sight as things of earth.
Who passes there?

[*Enter PHOCION behind, who strikes at ION with a dagger.*]

PHOCION.

This to the king of Argos!

[*ION struggles with him, seizes the dagger, which he throws away.*]

ION.

I will not fall by thee, poor wavering novice

In the assassin's trade!—thy arm is feeble—

[*He confronts PHOCION.*

Phocion!—was this well aim'd? thou didst not mean—

PHOCION.

I meant to take thy life, urged by remembrance
Of yesterday's great vow.

ION.

And couldst thou think

I had forgotten?

PHOCION.

Thou?

ION.

Couldst thou believe,

That one, whose nature had been arm'd to stop
The life-blood's current in a fellow's veins,
Would hesitate when gentler duty turn'd
His steel to nearer use? To-morrow's dawn
Shall see me wield the sceptre of my fathers:
Come, watch beside my throne, and, if I fail
In sternest duty which my country needs,
My bosom will be open to thy steel,
As now to thy embrace!

PHOCION.

Thus let me fall

Low at thy feet, and kneeling here receive
Forgiveness; do not crush me with more love
Than lies in the word "pardon."

ION.

And that word

I will not speak ;—what have I to forgive ?
A devious fancy, and a muscle raised
Obedient to its impulse ! Dost thou think
The tracings of a thousand kindnesses,
Which taught me all I guess'd of brotherhood,
Are in the rashness of a moment lost ?

PHOCION.

I cannot look upon thee ; let me go,
And lose myself in darkness.

ION.

Nay, old playmate,

We part not thus—the duties of my state
Will shortly end our fellowship ; but spend
A few sweet minutes with me. Dost remember
How in a night like this we climb'd yon walls—
Two vagrant urchins, and with tremulous joy
Skimm'd through these statue-border'd walks that gleam'd
In bright succession ? Let us tread them now ;
And think we are but older by a day,
And that the pleasant walk of yesternight
We are to-night retracing. Come, my friend !—
What, drooping yet ! thou wert not wont to seem
So stubborn—cheerily, my Phocion—come ! [*Exeunt.*

END OF ACT IV.

A C T V.

SCENE I.

TIME—THE MORNING OF THE SECOND DAY.

The Terrace of the Palace.

Two Soldiers on guard.

1 SOLDIER.

A stirring season, comrade ! our new prince
Has leap'd as eagerly into his seat
As he had languish'd an expectant heir
Weary of nature's kindness to old age.
He was esteem'd a modest stripling ;—strange
That he should, with such reckless hurry, seize
The gaudy shows of power !

2 SOLDIER.

'Tis honest nature ;
The royal instinct was but smouldering in him,
And now it blazes forth. I pray the gods
He may not give us cause to mourn his sire.

1 SOLDIER.

No more ; he comes.

Enter ION.

ION.

Why do ye loiter here?
Are all the statues decked with festal wreaths
As I commanded?

I SOLDIER.

We have been on guard
Here by Agenor's order since the nightfall.

ION.

On guard! Well, hasten now and see it done;
I need no guards. [*Exeunt Soldiers.*

The awful hour draws near;
I am composed to meet it.—Phocion comes:
He will unman me; yet he must not go,
Thinking his presence painful.

[*Enter* PHOCION.]

Friend, good morrow!
Thou play'st the courtier early.

PHOCION.

Canst thou speak
In that old tone of common cheerfulness,
That blithely promises delightful years,
And hold thy mournful purpose?

ION.

I have drawn
From the selectest fountain of repose
A blessed calm:—when I lay down to rest,

I fear'd lest bright remembrances of childhood
Should with untimely visitation mock me ;
But deep and dreamless have my slumbers been.
If sight of thee renews the thoughts of life
Too busily,—I prize the love that wakes them.

PHOCION.

Oh, cherish them, and let them plead with thee
To grant my prayer,—that thou wouldst live for Argos,
Not die for her ;—thy gracious life shall win
More than thy death the favour of the gods,
And charm the marble aspect of grim Fate
Into a blessed change : I, who am vow'd,
And who so late was arm'd Fate's minister,
Implore thee !

ION.

Speak to me no more of life ;
There is a dearer name I would recall—
Thou understand'st me—

Enter AGENOR.

AGENOR.

Thou hast forgot to name
Who shall be bidden to this evening's feast.

ION.

The feast ! most true ; I had forgotten it.
Bid whom thou wilt ; but let there be large store,
If our sad walls contain it, for the wretched
Whom hunger palsies. It may be few else
Will taste it with a relish.

[*Exit* AGENOR.]

[ION resumes his address to PHOCION, and continues it broken by the interruptions which follow.]

I would speak

A word of her who yester-morning rose
 To her light duties with as blithe a heart
 As ever yet its equal beating veil'd
 In moveless alabaster ;—plighted now,
 In liberal hour, to one whose destiny
 Shall freeze the sources of enjoyment in it,
 And make it heavy with the life-long pang
 A widow'd spirit bears !—

Enter CLEON.

CLEON.

The heralds wait

To learn the hour at which the solemn games
 Shall be proclaim'd.

ION.

The games !—yes, I remember
 That sorrow's darkest pageantries give place
 To youth's robustest pastimes—Death and Life
 Embracing :—at the hour of noon.

CLEON.

The wrestlers

Pray thee to crown the victor.

ION.

If I live,

Their wish shall govern me.

[*Exit* CLEON.]

Could I recall

One hour, and bid thy sister think of me
 With gentle sorrow, as a playmate lost,
 I should escape the guilt of having stopp'd
 The pulse of hope in the most innocent soul
 That ever passion ruffled. Do not talk
 Of me as I shall seem to thy kind thoughts,
 But harshly as thou canst; and if thou steal
 From thy rich store of popular eloquence
 Some bitter charge against the faith of kings,
 'Twill be an honest treason.

Enter CASSANDER.

CASSANDER.

Pardon me,
 If I entreat thee to permit a few
 Of thy once-cherish'd friends to bid thee joy
 Of that which swells their pride.

ION.

They 'll madden me.—

Dost thou not see me circled round with care?
 Urge me no more.

[*As CASSANDER is going, ION leaves PHOCION, and comes to him.*]

Come back, Cassander! see
 How greatness frets the temper. Keep this ring—
 It may remind thee of the pleasant hours
 That we have spent together, ere our fortunes
 Grew separate; and with thy gracious speech
 Excuse me to our friends.

[*Exit CASSANDER.*]

PHOCION.

'Tis time we seek

The temple.

ION.

Phocion! must I to the temple?

PHOCION.

There sacrificial rites must be perform'd
Before thou art enthroned.

ION.

Then I must gaze

On things which will arouse the struggling thoughts
I had subdued—perchance may meet with her
Whose name I dare not utter. I am ready. [Exeunt.

SCENE II.*The Temple.*

CLEMANTHE, ABRA.

ABRA.

Be comforted, dear lady;—he must come
To sacrifice.

CLEMANTHE.

Recall that churlish word,
That stubborn “*must*,” that bounds my living hopes,
As with an iron circle. He *must* come!

How piteous is affection's state, that cleaves
 To such a wretched prop! I had flown to him
 Long before this, but that I fear'd my presence
 Might prove a burthen,—and he sends no word,
 No token that he thinks of me! Art sure
 That he *must* come? The hope has torture in it;
 Yet it is all my bankrupt heart hath left
 To feed upon.

ABRA.

I see him now with Phocion
 Pass through the inner court.

CLEMANTHE.

He will not come
 This way, then, to the place for sacrifice.
 I can endure no more: speed to him, Abra;
 And bid him, if he holds Clemanthe's life
 Worthy a minute's loss, to seek me here.

ABRA.

Dear lady!—

CLEMANTHE.

Do not answer me, but run,
 Or I shall give yon crowd of sycophants
 To gaze upon my sorrow.

[*Exit* ABRA.]

It is hard;
 Yet I must strive to bear it, and find solace
 In that high fortune which has made him strange.
 He bends this way—but slowly—mournfully.
 O, he is ill; how has my slander wronged him!

Enter ION.

ION.

What wouldst thou with me, lady ?

CLEMANTHE.

Is it so ?

Nothing, my lord, save to implore thy pardon,
That the departing gleams of a bright dream,
From which I scarce had waken'd, made me bold
To crave a word with thee ;—but all are fled—
And I have nought to seek.

ION.

A goodly dream ;

But thou art right to think it was no more,
And study to forget it.

CLEMANTHE.

To forget it ?

Indeed, my lord, I cannot wish to lose
What, being past, is all my future hath,
All I shall live for : do not grudge me this,
The brief space I shall need it.

ION.

Speak not, fair one,

In tone so mournful, for it makes me feel
Too sensibly the hapless wretch I am,
That troubled the deep quiet of thy soul
In that pure fountain which reflected heaven,
For a brief taste of rapture.

CLEMANTHE.

Dost thou yet

Esteem it rapture, then? My foolish heart,
 Be still! Yet wherefore should a crown divide us?
 O, my dear Ion!—let me call thee so
 This once at least—it could not in my thoughts
 Increase the distance that there was between us,
 When, rich in spirit, thou to strangers' eyes
 Seem'd a poor foundling.

ION.

It must separate us!
 Think it no harmless bauble, but a curse
 Will freeze the current in the veins of youth,
 And from familiar touch of genial hand,
 From household pleasures, from sweet daily tasks,
 From airy thought, free wanderer of the heavens,
 For ever banish me!

CLEMANTHE.

Thou dost accuse
 Thy state too hardly. It may give some room,
 Some little space, amidst its radiant folds,
 For love to make its nest in!

ION.

Not for me:
 My pomp must be most lonesome, far removed
 From that sweet fellowship of human kind
 The slave rejoices in: my solemn robes
 Shall wrap me as a panoply of ice,
 And the attendants who may throng around me
 Shall want the flatteries which may basely warm
 The sceptral thing they circle. Dark and cold

Stretches the path, which, when I wear the crown,
I needs must enter :—the great gods forbid
That thou shouldst follow in it !

CLEMANTHE.

O unkind !

And shall we never see each other ?

ION [*after a pause.*]

Yes !

I have ask'd that dreadful question of the hills
That look eternal ; of the flowing streams
That lucid flow for ever ; of the stars,
Amid whose fields of azure my raised spirit
Hath trod in glory : all were dumb ; but now,
While I thus gaze upon thy living face,
I feel the love that kindles through its beauty
Can never wholly perish ;—we *shall* meet
Again, Clemanthe !

CLEMANTHE.

Bless thee for that name ;

Call me that name again ; thy words sound strangely,
Yet they breathe kindness. Shall we meet indeed ?
Think not I would intrude upon thy cares,
Thy councils, or thy pomps ;—to sit at distance,
To weave, with the nice labour which preserves
The rebel pulses even, from gay threads
Faint records of thy deeds, and sometimes catch
The falling music of a gracious word,
Or the stray sunshine of a smile, will be

Comfort enough :—do not deny me this ;
 Or if stern fate compel thee to deny,
 Kill me at once !

ION.

No ; thou must live, my fair one :
 There are a thousand joyous things in life,
 Which pass unheeded in a life of joy
 As thine hath been, till breezy sorrow comes
 To ruffle it ; and daily duties paid
 Hardly at first, at length will bring repose
 To the sad mind that studies to perform them.
 Thou dost not mark me.

CLEMANTHE.

Oh, I do ! I do !

ION.

If for thy brother's and thy father's sake
 Thou art content to live, the healer Time
 Will reconcile thee to the lovely things
 Of this delightful world,—and if another,
 A happier—no, I cannot bid thee love
 Another !—I did think I could have said it,
 But 'tis in vain.

CLEMANTHE.

Thou art mine own then still ?

ION.

I am thine own ! thus let me clasp thee ; nearer ;
 O joy too thrilling and too short !

Enter AGENOR.

AGENOR.

My Lord,

The sacrificial rites await thy presence.

ION.

I come.—One more embrace—the last, the last
In this world! Now farewell!

[*Exit.*]

CLEMANTHE.

The last embrace!

Then he has cast me off!—No, 'tis not so;
Some mournful secret of his fate divides us:
I'll struggle to bear that, and snatch a comfort
From seeing him uplifted. I will look
Upon him in his throne; Minerva's shrine
Will shelter me from vulgar gaze; I'll hasten,
And feast my sad eyes with his greatness there!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE III.

*The Great Square of the City—on one side a throne of
state prepared,—on the other an altar,—the statues
decorated with garlands.*

Enter CTESIPHON and CASSANDER.

CTESIPHON.

Vex me no more, by telling me, Cassander,
Of his fair speech: I prize it at its worth:
Thou'lt see how he will act when seated firm

Upon the throne the craven tyrant fill'd,
Whose blood he boasts, unless some honest arm
Should shed it first.

CASSANDER.

Hast thou forgot the time
When thou thyself wert eager to foretell
His manhood's glory from his childish virtues?
Let me not think thee one of those fond prophets,
Who are well pleased still to foretell success,
So it remain their dream.

CTESIPHON.

Thou dost forget
What has chill'd fancy and delight within me—
[Music at a distance.]
Hark!—servile trumpets speak his coming—watch
How power will change him. *[They stand aside.]*

*The Procession. Enter MEDON, AGENOR, PHOCION,
TIMOCLES, CLEON, Sages and People; ION last, in
royal robes. He advances amidst shouts, and speaks.*

ION.

I thank you for your greeting—Shout no more,
But in deep silence raise your hearts to Heaven,
That it may strengthen one so young and frail
As I am, for the business of this hour.
Must I sit here?

MEDON.

Permit thy earliest friend,

Who has so often propp'd thy tottering steps,
To lead thee to thy throne,—and thus fulfil
His fondest vision.

ION.

Thou art still most kind—

MEDON.

Nay, do not think of me, my son! my son!
What ails thee? When thou shouldst reflect the joy
Of Argos, the strange paleness of the grave
Marbles thy face.

ION.

Am I indeed so pale?

It is a solemn office I assume;
Yet thus, with Phœbus' blessing, I embrace it.

[Sits on the throne.]

Stand forth, Agenor!

AGENOR.

I await thy will.

ION.

To thee I look as to the wisest friend
Of this afflicted people:—thou must leave
Awhile the quiet which thy life hath earn'd,
To rule our councils; fill the seats of justice
With good men not so absolute in goodness,
As to forget what human frailty is;
And order my sad country.

AGENOR.

Pardon me—

ION.

Nay, I will promise 'tis my last request ;
 Thou never couldst deny me what I sought
 In boyish wantonness, and shalt not grudge
 Thy wisdom to me, till our state revive
 From its long anguish ;—it will not be long
 If Heaven approve me here. Thou hast all power
 Whether I live or die.

AGENOR.

Die ! I am old—

ION.

Death is not jealous of thy mild decay,
 Which gently wins thee his : exulting Youth
 Provokes the ghastly monarch's sudden stride,
 And makes his horrid fingers quick to clasp
 His shivering prey at noontide. Let me see
 The captain of the guard.

CRYTHES.

I kneel to crave
 Humbly the favour which thy sire bestow'd
 On one who loved him well.

ION.

I cannot thank thee,
 That wakest the memory of my father's weakness ;
 But I will not forget that thou hast shared
 The light enjoyments of a noble spirit,
 And learn'd the need of luxury. I grant
 For thee and thy brave comrades, ample share
 Of such rich treasure as my stores contain,

To grace thy passage to some distant land,
Where, if an honest cause engage thy sword,
May glorious laurels wreath it! In our realm
We shall not need it longer.

CRYTHES.

Dost intend

To banish the firm troops before whose valour
Barbarian millions shrink appall'd, and leave
Our city naked to the first assault
Of reckless foes?

ION.

No, Crythes!—in ourselves,
In our own honest hearts and chainless hands
Will be our safeguard :—while we seek no use
Of arms, we would not have our children blend
With their first innocent wishes ; while the love
Of Argos and of justice shall be one
To their young reason ; while their sinews grow
Firm midst the gladness of heroic sports ;
We shall not ask to guard our country's peace
One selfish passion, or one venal sword.
I would not grieve thee ;—but thy valiant troop—
For I esteem them valiant—must no more
With luxury which suits a desperate camp
Infect us. See that they embark, Agenor,
Ere night.

CRYTHES.

My lord—

ION.

No more—my word hath pass'd.

Medon, there is no office I can add
 To those thou hast grown old in ; thou wilt guard
 The shrine of Phœbus, and within thy home—
 Thy too delightful home—befriend the stranger
 As thou didst me ;—there sometimes waste a thought
 On thy spoil'd inmate !

MEDON.

Think of thee, my lord ?

Long shall we triumph in thy glorious reign—

ION.

Prithee no more. Argives ! I have a boon
 To crave of you ;—whene'er I shall rejoin
 In death the father from whose heart in life
 Stern fate divided me, think gently of him !
 For ye, who saw him in his full-blown pride,
 Knew little of affections crush'd within,
 And wrongs which frenzied him ; yet never more
 Let the great interests of the state depend
 Upon the thousand chances that may sway
 A piece of human frailty ! Swear to me
 That ye will seek hereafter in yourselves
 The means of sovereign rule :—our narrow space,
 So happy in its confines, so compact,
 Needs not the magic of a single name
 Which wider regions may require to draw
 Their interests into one ; but, circled thus,
 Like a bless'd family by simple laws,

May tenderly be govern'd ; all degrees
Moulded together as a single form
Of nymph-like loveliness, which finest chords
Of sympathy pervading shall suffuse
In times of quiet with one bloom, and fill
With one resistless impulse, if the hosts
Of foreign power should threaten. Swear to me
That ye will do this !

MEDON.

Wherefore ask this now ?
Thou shalt live long ;—the paleness of thy face
Which late appall'd me is grown radiant now,
And thine eyes kindle with the prophecy
Of lustrous years.

ION.

The gods approve me then ?
Yet I will use the function of a king,
And claim obedience. Promise if I leave
No issue, that the sovereign power shall live
In the affections of the general heart,
And in the wisdom of the best.

MEDON *and others.*

We swear it !

ION.

Hear and record the oath, immortal powers !
Now give me leave a moment to approach
That altar unattended. [*He goes to the altar.*]

Gracious gods !

In whose mild service my glad youth was spent,

Look on me now ;—and if there is a Power,
 As at this solemn time I feel there is,
 Beyond ye, that hath breathed through all your shapes
 The spirit of the beautiful that lives
 In earth and heaven ;—to ye I offer up
 This conscious being, full of life and love,
 For my dear country's welfare. Let this blow
 End all her sorrows !

[*Stabs himself, and falls. CTESIPHON rushes to support him.*]

Ctesiphon, thou art
 Avenged, and wilt forgive me.

CTESIPHON.

Thou hast pluck'd
 The poor disguise of hatred from my soul,
 And made me feel how shallow is the wish
 Of vengeance. Could I die to save thee !

CLEMANTHE *rushes forward.*

CLEMANTHE.

Hold !

Let me support him—stand away—indeed
 I have best right, although ye know it not,
 To cling to him in death.

ION.

This is a joy
 I did not hope for—this is sweet indeed.—
 Bend thine eyes on me !

CLEMANTHE.

And for this it was

Thou wouldst have wean'd me from thee? Couldst thou
think

I would be so divorced?

ION.

Thou art right, Clemanthe,—

It was a shallow and an idle thought;

'Tis past; no show of coldness frets us now;

No vain disguise, my love. Yet thou wilt think

On that which, when I feign'd I truly said—

Wilt thou not, sweet one?

CLEMANTHE.

I will treasure all.

Enter IRUS.

IRUS.

I bring you glorious tidings—Ha! no joy

Can enter here.

ION.

Yes—is it as I hope?

IRUS.

The pestilence abates.

ION. [*springs on his feet.*]

Do ye not hear?

Why shout ye not?—ye are strong—think not of me;

Hearken! the curse my ancestry has spread

O'er Argos is dispell'd—Agenor, give

This gentle youth his freedom, who hath brought

Sweet tidings that I shall not die in vain—

And Medon ! cherish him as thou hast one
Who dying blesses thee ;—my own Clemanthe !
Let this console thee also—Argos lives—
The offering is accepted—all is well !

[Dies.]

The curtain falls.

S O N N E T S.

I.

EVENING SERVICE

PERFORMED BY DR. VALPY AT READING SCHOOL.

THERE is a holy magic in that tone,
Can wake from Memory's selectest cell
The hour when first upon my heart it fell
Like dew from heaven :—the years that since have flown
Seem airy dreams ;—yet not of self alone
Those sacred strains are eloquent ;—they tell
Of numbers temper'd by their simple spell
In boyhood's unreflecting prime to own
Their kindred with their fellows—best of lore !—
Who to this spot, as Persians to the East,
Turn reverential thoughts from every shore
Which holds them ; nor forbear till life hath ceased
With child-like love a blessing to implore
On thee, mild Charity's unspotted Priest !

II.

THE FORBURY, AT READING,

VISITED ON A MISTY EVENING IN AUTUMN.

SOFT uplands, that in boyhood's earliest days
Seem'd mountain-like and distant, fain once more
Would I behold you ; but the autumn hoar
Hath veil'd your pensive groves in evening haze ;
Yet do I wait till on my searching gaze
Your outline lives—more dear than if ye wore
An April sunset's consecrating rays—
For, even thus the images of yore
Which ye awaken glide from misty years
Dream-like and solemn, and but half unfold
Their tale of glorious hopes, religious fears,
And visionary schemes of giant mould ;
Whose dimmest trace the world-worn heart reveres,
And, with love's grasping weakness, strives to hold.

III.

ON HEARING THE SHOUTS OF THE PEOPLE

AT THE READING ELECTION IN THE SUMMER 1826,

AT A DISTANCE.

HARK ! from the distant town the long acclaim
On the charm'd silence of the evening breaks
With startling interruption ;—yet it wakes
Thought of that voice of never-dying fame
Which on my boyish meditation came
Here, at an hour like this ;—my soul partakes
A moment's gloom, that yon fierce contest slakes
Its thirst of high emprise and glorious aim :
Yet wherefore ? Feelings that from heaven are shed
Into these tenements of flesh, ally
Themselves to earthly passions, lest, unfed
By warmth of human sympathies, they die ;
And shall—earth's fondest aspirations dead—
Fulfil their first and noblest prophecy.

IV.

VIEW OF THE VALLEY OF READING,

FROM TILEHURST, AT THE CLOSE OF THE SAME ELECTION.

Too long have I regarded thee, fair vale,
But as a scene of struggle which denies
All pensive joy ; and now with childhood's eyes
In old tranquillity, I bid thee hail ;
And welcome to my soul thy own sweet gale,
Which wakes from loveliest woods the melodies
Of long-lost fancy—Never may there fail
Within thy circlet, spirits born to rise
In honour—whether won by Freedom rude
In her old Spartan majesty, or wrought
With partial, yet no base regard, to brood
O'er usages by time with sweetness fraught ;
Be thou their glory-tinted solitude,
The cradle and the home of generous thought !

V.

TO THE THAMES AT WESTMINSTER,

/ IN RECOLLECTION OF THE BANKS OF THE SAME RIVER

AT CAVERSHAM, NEAR READING.

WITH no cold admiration do I gaze
Upon thy pomp of waters, matchless stream !
But home-sick fancy kindles with the beam
That on thy lucid bosom coyly plays ;
And glides delighted through thy crystal ways,
Till on her eye those wave-fed poplars gleam,
Beneath whose shade her first ethereal maze
She fashion'd ; where she traced in clearest dream
Thy mirror'd course of wood-enshrined repose
Besprent with island haunts of spirits bright ;
And widening on—till, at the vision's close,
Great London, only then a name of might
For childish thought to build on, proudly rose
A rock-throned city clad in heavenly light.

VI.

TO THE SAME RIVER.

I MAY not emulate their lofty aim,
Who, in divine imagination, bold,
With mighty hills and streams communion hold,
As living friends ; and scarce I dare to claim
Acquaintance with thee in thy scenes of fame,
Wealthiest of Rivers ! though in days of old
I loved thee where thy waters sylvan roll'd,
And in some sense would deem thee yet the same.
As love perversely cleaves to some old mate
Estranged by fortune ; in his very pride
Seems lifted ; waxes in his greatness great ;
And silent hails the lot it prophesied,—
Content to think in manhood's palmy state
Some lingering traces of the child abide.

VII.

TO W. C. MACREADY, ESQ.

ON HIS PERFORMANCE OF WERNER, IN LORD BYRON'S

TRAGEDY OF THAT NAME.

O LEARNED in Affection's thousand ways !
I thought thy art had proved its happiest power,
When thou didst bend above the opening flower
Of sweet Virginia's beauty, and with praise
Measured in words but fineless in the gaze
Of the proud sire, her gentle secret won :
Or when the patriot archer's hardy son
Was school'd by doting sternness for the hour
Of glorious peril ; but the just designs
Were ready : now thy soul's affections glow,
By thy own genius train'd, through frigid lines,
And make a scorner's bloodless fancy show
When Love disdain'd round its cold idol twines.
How mighty are its weakness and its woe !

VIII.

FAME—THE SYMBOL AND PROOF OF IMMORTALITY.

THE names that slow Oblivion have defied,
And passionate Ambition's wildest shocks
Stand in lone grandeur, like eternal rocks,
To cast broad shadows o'er the silent tide
Of Time's unebbing flood, whose waters glide,
To ponderous darkness from their secret spring,
And, bearing on each transitory thing,
Leave those old monuments in loneliest pride.
There stand they—fortresses uprear'd by man,
Whose earthly frame is mortal; symbols high
Of life unchanging,—strength that cannot die;
Proofs that our nature is not of a span,
But of immortal essence, and allied
To life and joy and love unperishing.

THE END.

PRINTED BY A. J. VALPY,
RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

THE
ATHENIAN CAPTIVE.

A TRAGEDY.

IN FIVE ACTS.

BY

THOMAS NOON TALFOURD,

AUTHOR OF "ION," &c.

FIRST ACTED AT COVENT GARDEN THEATRE, APRIL 28, 1833.

LONDON:
EDWARD MOXON, DOVER STREET.

MDCCCXXXVIII.

BRADBURY AND EVANS,
PRINTERS-EXTRAORDINARY TO THE QUEEN,
WHITEFRIARS.

TO

THE RIGHT HON. THOMAS LORD DENMAN,

LORD CHIEF JUSTICE OF HER MAJESTY'S COURT OF QUEEN'S BENCH,

IN TESTIMONY OF DEEP ADMIRATION

OF THOSE QUALITIES WHICH WERE THE GRACE AND DELIGHT
OF THE BAR,

AND WHICH HAPPILY ADORN THE BENCH ;

AND IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF MANY CHEERING KINDNESSES ;

This Tragedy

IS, WITH HIS PERMISSION,

RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

P R E F A C E.

THE existence of the following scenes is entirely to be attributed to the earnest desire which I felt, to assist, even in the slightest degree, the endeavour which Mr. Macready has made this season in the cause of the acted Drama. More than contented with the unhopèd for association I had obtained with the living influences of scenic representation, in the indulgence accorded to "Ion," I should have postponed all thought of again venturing before the public, until years had brought leisure, which might enable me to supply, by labour and by care, what I knew to be wanting in the higher requisites of tragic style. But I could not perceive a gentleman, whose friendship I had long enjoyed, forsaking the certain rewards of his art, and the tranquil pleasures of domestic life, to engage in the chivalrous

endeavour to support a cause, which I believe to be that of humanity and of goodness, and which seemed almost desperate, without a feverish anxiety to render him assistance, and perhaps a tendency to mistake the will for the power. The position of the two great theatres—with a legal monopoly, which has been frittered away piecemeal without recompense, until nothing remains but the debts which were contracted on the faith of its continuance, and the odium of its name;—opposed to a competition with numerous establishments, dividing the dramatic talent and dissipating the dramatic interest of the town,—rendered the determination of Mr. Macready to risk his property, his time, and his energies in the management of one of them, a subject of an interest almost painful. Impressed with this sentiment, at a time when it was unforeseen that one of the most distinguished of our authors would lend his aid—when no tragic creation of Knowles “cast its shadow before,” with its assurance of power and of beauty,—when the noble revivals of Lear and of Coriolanus were only to be guessed at from those of Hamlet and Macbeth,—I determined to make an attempt, marked, I fear, with more zeal than

wisdom. Having submitted the outline of this Drama to the friend and artist most interested in the result, and having received his encouragement to proceed, I devoted my little vacation of Christmas to its composition;—and, with the exception of some alterations (for the suggestion of the principal of which I am indebted to him,) succeeded so far as to finish it before the renewal of other (I can hardly say) severer labours. Whether I may succeed in doing more than thus gratifying my own feelings, and testifying their strength by the effort, is, at this time, doubtful;—but, in no event, shall I regret having made it.

At this period I can only, of course, imperfectly estimate the extent of the obligation I shall owe to the performers; but, as no other opportunity may occur, I cannot refrain from thanking them for the zeal and cordiality with which they have thus far supported me. Among them I am happy to find my old and constant friend, Mr. Serle,—who should rather be engaged in embodying his own conceptions than in lending strength to mine. And I cannot refrain from mentioning the sacrifice made to the common

cause by Miss Helen Faucit, in consenting to perform a character far beneath the sphere in which she is entitled to move; and which, even when elevated and graced by her, will, I fear, be chiefly noted for her good-nature in accepting it.

The First Scene of the Third Act, and the Second Scene of the Fourth Act, are omitted in the representation; and some alterations, suggested at rehearsal, have been made in the conduct of the closing Scene.

T. N. T.

Russell Square, 28th April, 1838.

Persons of the Drama,

AS REPRESENTED AT COVENT GARDEN THEATRE.

CREON . .	King of Corinth	MR. WARDE.
HYLLUS . .	Son of Creon	MR. ANDERSON.
IPHITUS . .	Priest of the Temple of Jupiter the } Avenger, at Corinth }	MR. SERLE.
CALCHAS . .	An Athenian, living at Corinth	MR. WALDRON.
THOAS . .	An Athenian Warrior	MR. MACREADY.
PENTHEUS . .	An Athenian Warrior, his Friend	MR. DIDDEAR.
LYCUS . .	Master of the Slaves to the King of } Corinth }	MR. HOWE.

Athenian and Corinthian Soldiers, &c.

ISMENE . .	Queen of Corinth ; second wife of } Creon }	MRS. WARNER.
CREUSA . .	Daughter of Creon ; twin-born of } his first wife with Hyllus }	MISS HELEN FAUCIT.

SCENE—*Corinth, and its immediate neighbourhood.*

TIME OF ACTION—*Two days.*

THE
ATHENIAN CAPTIVE.

A TRAGEDY.

ACT I.

SCENE I.

The Acropolis of Corinth.

CREON *reclining on a bench, beneath open columns.—*

IPHITUS *a little behind him, in the dress of Augury, watching the flight of birds. The Sea seen far below, in the distance.*

IPHITUS.

Wheel through the ambient air, ye sacred birds,
In circles still contracting, that aspire
To share the radiance of yon dazzling beams,
And 'midst them float from mortal gaze ; ye speak
In no uncertain language to the sons
Of Corinth, that the shames they bear from Athens
Shall speedily be lost in glories won

From insolent battalions, that have borne
Their triumphs to our gates. Rejoice, my king !
Leave mournful contemplation of the dust,
To hail the omen !

CREON.

I am so perplex'd
With the faint tracings age's weakness shapes,
That I distinguish not the winged forms
Thou speakest of, from the mists that flicker quick
On eyes which soon must be all dark. To me
No omen can be otherwise than sad !

IPHITUS.

Surely, my king—for I will answer thee
Untrembling, as Jove's minister—these signs
Should make thy heart beat proudly ; hast not felt
Upon our loftiest eminence, the blight
Of that dishonour which alone can slay
The spirit of a people ;—seen our fanes
Crowded with suppliants from our wasted fields,
Shrieking for help in vain, and mourn'd the power
Of Athens to convert our cloudless sky,
And the bright sea which circles us, to bounds
Of a great prison ? If thy kingly soul
Hath shrunk—as well I know it hath—from shame
Without example in our story, now
Bid it expand, as our beleaguer'd gates

Shall open wide to let our heroes pass,
With brows which glisten to receive the laurel
From their king's hand.

CREON.

Perchance to see him die.

O, Iphitus! thy king hath well nigh spent
His store of wealth, of glory, and of power,
Which made him master of the hopes and strengths
Of others! While the haggard Fury waits
To cut the knot which binds his thousand threads
Of lustrous life, and the sad ghost forsakes
The palace of its regal clay, to shrink,
Thin as a beggar's, sceptreless, uncrown'd,
Unheeded, to the throng'd and silent shore
Where flattery soothes not, think'st thou it can draw
A parting comfort from surrounding looks
Of lusty youth, prepar'd, with beaming joy,
To hail a young successor?

IPHITUS.

Still thine age
Is green and hopeful; there is nought about thee
To speak of mortal sickness, and unnerve
A soul that once was noble.

CREON.

Priest, forbear!

The life that lingers in me is the witness

With which I may not palter. I may seem
 To-day to wear the look of yesterday,—
 A shrivell'd, doting, peevish, weak old man,
 Who may endure some winters more to strip
 A leaflet daily from him, till he stands
 So bare of happiness, that Death hath scarce
 An art to make him nakeder. My soul
 Begins its solemn whispers of adieu
 To earth's too sweet companionship. Yet, hark!
 It is Creusa's footstep; is't not, priest?
 Is not my child approaching us?

IPHITUS.

Afar

I see the snowy foldings of a robe
 Wave through the column'd avenue; thy sense
 Is finer than the impatient ear of youth,
 That it should catch the music of a step
 So distant and so gentle.

CREON.

If thou wert

A father, thou wouldst know a father's love
 'Mid nature's weakness, for one failing sense
 Still finds another sharpen'd to attend
 Its finest ministries. Unlike the pomps
 That make the dregs of life more bitter, this
 Can sweeten even a king's.

[CREUSA passes across the stage behind CREON, bearing offerings.]

She passes on ;
So ! So ! all leave me. Call her, Iphitus,
Though that her duty own no touch of fondness,
I will command her. Am I not her king ?
Why dost not call ?

Re-enter CREUSA, who kneels in front to CREON.

Ah ! thou art there, my child ;
Methinks my waning sight grows clear, to drink
The perfect picture of thy beauty in ;
And I grow gentle—Ah ! too gentle, girl—
Wherefore didst pass me by without regard,
Who have scant blessing left save thus to gaze
And listen to thee ?

CREUSA.

Pardon me, my father,
If, bearing offerings to the shrine of Jove
For my sweet brother's safety, anxious thoughts
Clove to him in the battle with a force
Which made its strangest shapes of horror live
As present things ; and, lost in their pursuit,
I heeded not my father.

CREON.

In the battle ?
Is Hyllus in the combat 'mid those ranks
Of iron ? He who hath not rounded yet .

His course of generous exercise? I'm weak ;
 Is that the cause? Is he impatient grown
 To put the royal armour on, his sire
 Must never wear again? Oh, no! his youth,
 In its obedient gentleness, hath been
 An infancy prolong'd! It is the Power
 Which strikes me with the portents of the grave,
 That by the sight of his ensanguined corpse
 Would hasten their fulfilment; 'tis well aim'd,
 I shall fall cold before it.

CREUSA.

'Twas a word,
 Dropp'd by the queen in answer to some speech
 In which she fancied slight to Athens, rous'd
 His spirit to an ecstasy; he spurn'd
 The light accoutrements of mimic war;
 Borrow'd a soldier's sword, and, with the troops
 Who sallied forth at day-break, sought the field—
 Where Jupiter protect him!

CREON.

Bid the queen
 Here answer to us. [Exit IPHITUS.]

Rarely will she speak,
 And calmly, yet her sad and solemn words
 Have power to thrill and madden. O my girl,
 Had not my wayward fancy been enthrall'd

By that Athenian loveliness which shone
From basest vestments, in a form whose grace
Made the cold beauty of Olympus earth's,
And drew me to be traitor to the urn
Which holds thy mother's ashes, I had spent
My age in sweet renewal of my youth
With thought of her who gladden'd it, nor known
The vain endeavour to enforce regard
From one whose heart is dead amidst the living.

Re-enter IPHITUS.

CREON.

Comes the queen hither? Does she mock our bidding?

IPHITUS.

At stern Minerva's inmost shrine she kneels,
And with an arm as rigid and as pale
As is the giant statue, clasps the foot
That seems as it would spurn her, yet were stay'd
By the firm suppliant's will. She looks attent
As one who caught some hint of distant sounds,
Yet none from living intercourse of man
Can pierce that marble solitude. Her face
Uprais'd, is motionless,—yet while I mark'd it—
As from its fathomless abode a spring
Breaks on the bosom of a sullen lake
And in an instant grows as still,—a hue
Of blackness trembled o'er it; her large eye

Kindled with frightful lustre ;—but the shade
 Pass'd instant thence ; her face resum'd its look
 Of stone, as death-like as the aspect pure
 Of the great face divine to which it answered.
 I durst not speak to her.

CREON.

I see it plain ;
 Her thoughts are with our foes, the blood of Athens
 Mantles or freezes in her alien veins ;
 Let her alone. *[Shouts without.*

CREUSA.

Hark !—They would never shout
 If Hyllus were in peril.

CREON.

Were he slain
 In dashing back the dusky wall of shields,
 Beneath which Athens masks her pride of war,
 They would exult and mock the slaughter'd boy
 With Pæans.

CREUSA.

So my brother would have chosen !
[Shouts renewed.

Enter Corinthian Soldier.

SOLDIER.

Our foes are driven to their tents, the field
 Is ours—

CREON. [*Hastily interrupting him.*]

What of the prince—my son?
Thou dost avoid his name;—have ye achiev'd
This noisy triumph with his blood?

SOLDIER.

A wound,
Slight, as we hope, hath grac'd his early valour,
And though it draws some colour from his cheek
Leaves the heart fearless.

CREON.

I will well avenge
The faintest breath of sorrow which hath dimm'd
The mirror of his youth. Will he not come?
Why does he linger, if his wound is slight,
From the fond arms of him who will avenge it?

SOLDIER.

He comes, my lord.

CREON.

Make way, there! Let me clasp him!

Enter HYLLUS, pale, as slightly wounded.

Why does he not embrace me?

[CREUSA runs to HYLLUS, and supports him as he moves
towards CREON.]

CREUSA.

He is faint,
Exhausted, breathless,—bleeding. Lean on me,

[To HYLLUS.

And let me lead thee to the king, who pants
To bid his youngest soldier welcome.

HYLLUS.

Nay

'Tis nothing. Silly trembler!—See, my limbs
Are pliant and my sinews docile still. [Kneels to CREON.
Kneel with me; pray our father to forgive
The disobedience of his truant son,
His first—oh, may it prove the last!

[CREUSA kneels with HYLLUS to CREON.

CREON.

My son!

Who fancied I was angry?

Enter ISMENE.

(To ISMENE.) Art thou come,
To gaze upon the perill'd youth who owes
His wound to thee?

ISMENE.

He utter'd shallow scorn
Of Athens;—which he ne'er will speak again.

CREON.

Wouldst dare to curb his speech?

HYLLUS.

Forbear, my father ;

The queen says rightly. In that idle mood,
Which youth's excess of happiness makes wanton,
I slighted our illustrious foes, whose arms
Have, with this mild correction, taught my tongue
An apter phrase of modesty, and shewn
What generous courage is, which till this day
I dimly guess'd at.

CREON.

Canst thou tell his name,
Who impious drew the blood of him who soon—
Too soon, alas !—shall reign in Corinth ?

HYLLUS.

One

I'm proud to claim my master in great war ;
With whom contesting, I have tasted first
The joy which animates the glorious game
Where fiercest opposition of brave hearts
Makes them to feel their kindred ;—one who spar'd me
To grace another fight,—the sudden smart
His sword inflicted, made me vainly rush
To grapple with him ; from his fearful grasp

I sank to earth ; as I lay prone in dust,
 The broad steel shiv'ring in my eyes, that strove
 To keep their steady gaze, I met his glance,
 Where pity triumph'd ; quickly he return'd
 His falchion to its sheath, and with a hand
 Frank and sustaining as a brother's palm,
 Uprais'd me ;—while he whisper'd in mine ear,
 “ Thou hast dar'd well, young soldier,” our hot troops
 Environ'd him, and bore him from the plain
 Our army's noblest captive.

CREON.

He shall die ;
 The gen'rous falsehood of thy speech is vain.

CREUSA.

O no ! my brother's words were never false ;
 The heroic picture proves his truth ;—they bring
 A gallant prisoner towards us. Sure, 'tis he.

Enter THOAS, *in armour, guarded by Corinthian Soldiers,*
and LYCUS, *Master of the Slaves.*

SOLDIER.

My lord, we bring the captive, whom we found
 In combat with the prince.

HYLLUS.

Say rather, found
 Raising that prince whose rashness he chastis'd,
 And taught how he should treat a noble foe.

CREON.

[*To the Soldiers.*]

Answer to me ! Why have ye brought this man,
Whom the just gods have yielded to atone
For princely blood he shed, in pride of arms ?
Remove that helmet.

THOAS.

He who stirs to touch
My arms, shall feel a dying warrior's grasp.
I will not doff my helmet till I yield
My neck to your slave's butchery ; how soon
That stroke may fall, I care not.

CREUSA.

[*To HYLLUS.*]

Hyllus, speak !
Why thus transfix'd ? Wilt thou not speak for him
Who spar'd a life, which, light perchance to thee,
Is the most precious thing to me on earth ?

THOAS.

[*To CREUSA.*]

Ere I descend to that eternal gloom
Which opens to enfold me, let me bless
The vision that hath cross'd it !

HYLLUS.

[*To CREON.*]

If thou slay him,
I will implore the mercy of the sword
To end me too ; and, that sad grace withheld,
Will kneel beside his corpse till nature give
Her own dismissal to me.

ISMENE. [*Speaking slowly to CREON.*]

Let him breathe
A slave's ignoble life out here ; 'twill prove
The sterner fortune.

CREON.

Hearken to me, prisoner !
My boy hath won this choice—immediate death,
Or life-long portion with my slaves.

THOAS.

Dost dare
Insult a son of Athens by the doubt
Thy words imply ? Wert thou in manhood's prime,
Amidst thy trembling slaves would I avenge
The foul suggestion, with the desperate strength
Of fated valour ; but thou art in years,
And I should blush to harm thee ;—let me die.

CREUSA.

O do not fling away thy noble life,
For it is rich in treasures of its own,
Which Fortune cannot touch, and vision'd glories
Shall stream around its bondage.

THOAS.

I have dream'd
Indeed of greatness, lovely one, and felt
The very dream worth living for, while hope,
To make it real, surviv'd ; and I have lov'd

To image thought, the mirror of great deeds,
 Fed by the past to might which should impel
 And vivify the future;—blending thus
 The aims and triumphs of a hero's life.
 But to cheat hopeless infamy with shows
 Of nobleness, and filch a feeble joy
 In the vain spasms of the slavish soul,
 Were foulest treachery to the god within me.
 No, lady; from the fissure of a rock,
 Scath'd and alone, my brief existence gush'd,
 A passion'd torrent;—let it not be lost
 In miry sands, but having caught one gleam
 Of loveliness to grace it, dash from earth
 To darkness and to silence. Lead me forth—
 (*To CREUSA.*) The Gods requite thee!

CREON.

Hath the captive chosen?

I will not grant another moment;—speak!

Wilt serve or perish?

HYLLUS.

[*Throwing himself before* THOAS.

Do not answer yet!

Grant him a few short minutes to decide,

And let me spend them with him.

CREON.

[*Rising.*

Be it so, then!

Kneel, prisoner, to the prince who won thee grace

No other mortal could have gain'd :—remember
 The master of my slaves attends the word
 Thou presently shalt utter ; tame thy pride
 To own his government, or he must bind,
 And slay thee. Daughter, come ! The queen attends us.

[*Exeunt* CREON and SOLDIERS.]

CREUSA.

[*To* HYLLUS, *as she passes him.*

Thou wilt not leave him till he softens.

[ISMENE *follows ; as she passes* THOAS, *she speaks in a low and solemn tone.*

ISMENE.

Live !

THOAS.

Who gave that shameful counsel ?

ISMENE.

[*Passing on.*

One of Athens. [*Exit.*

[*Exeunt all but* LYCUS, *the Master of the Slaves,—*

THOAS and HYLLUS.]

THOAS.

[*Abstractedly.*

What words are these, which bid my wayward blood,
 That centred at my heart with icy firmness,
 Come tingling back through all my veins ? I seem
 Once more to drink Athenian ether in,
 And the fair city's column'd glories flash
 Upon my soul !

LYCUS.

My lord, I dare not wait.

HYLLUS. [*Eagerly to LYCUS.*

He yields ;—I read it in his softening gaze ;
It speaks of life.

THOAS.

Yes ; I will owe life to thee.

HYLLUS.

Thou hear'st him, Lycus. Let me know the name
Of him whom I could deem my friend.

THOAS.

My name !

I have none worthy of thy ear ; I thought
To arm a common sound with deathless power ;
'Tis past ; thou only mark'st me from the crowd
Of crawling earth-worms ;—thou may'st call me, Thoas.

LYCUS. [*Coming forward.*

My prince, forgive me ; I must take his armour,
And lead him hence.

THOAS.

Great Jupiter, look down !

HYLLUS.

Thoas, thy faith is pledged. [*To LYCUS.*] Stand back awhile,
If thou hast nature. Thoas will to me
Resign his arms.

THOAS. [*Taking off his helmet.*]

To a most noble hand

I yield the glories of existence up,
 And bid them long adieu! This plume, which now
 Hangs motionless, as if it felt the shame
 Its owner bears, wav'd in my boyish thoughts
 Ere I was free to wear it, as the sign,
 The dancing image of my bounding hopes,
 That imag'd it above a throng of battles,
 Waving where blows were fiercest. Take it hence—
 Companion of brave fancies, vanish'd now
 For ever, follow them!

[HYLLUS *takes the helmet from THOAS, and passes it to*
 LYCUS.]

HYLLUS.

'Tis nobly done;

No doubt that it again shall clasp thy brow,
 And the plume wave in victory. Thy sword?
 Forgive me; I must filch it for awhile:
 Hide it—O deem it so—in idle sport,
 And keep thy chidings, till I give it back
 Again to smite and spare.

THOAS.

Too generous youth,
 Permit my depth of sorrow to be calm,
 Unruffled by vain hope. [*Takes off his sword.*]
 Farewell, old sword,

Thou wert the bright inheritance which grac'd
 My finish'd years of boyhood—all that time
 And fortune spar'd of those from whom I drew
 The thirst of greatness. In how proud an hour
 Did I first clasp thee with untrembling hand,
 Fit thee, with fond exactness, to my side,
 And in the quaint adornments of thy sheath
 Guess deeds of valour, acted in old time
 By some forgotten chief, whose generous blood
 I felt within my swelling veins! Farewell!

[THOAS gives his sword to HYLUS, who delivers it to
 LYCUS.

HYLLUS.

[*Diffidently.*

Thy buckler?

THOAS.

[*Takes off his buckler eagerly, and delivers it to HYLUS.*

I rejoice to part with that;
 My bosom needs no bulwark save its own,
 For I am only man now. If my heart
 Should in its throbbing burst, 'twill beat against
 An unapparell'd casing, and be still.

[*Going.*

HYLLUS.

[*Hesitatingly.*

Hold!—one thing more—thy girdle holds a knife;
 I grieve that I must ask it.

THOAS.

By the sense

Which 'mid delights I feel thou hast not lost,

Of what, in dread extremity, the brave,
 Stripp'd of all other refuge, would embrace,—
 I do adjure thee,—rob me not of this !

HYLLUS.

Conceal it in thy vest.

[THOAS *hastily places his dagger in his bosom,*
and takes the hand of HYLLUS.]

THOAS.

We understand
 Each other's spirit ;—thou hast call'd me friend,
 And though in bonds, I answer to the name,
 And give it thee again.

LYCUS (*advancing*).

The time is spent
 Beyond the king's allowance : I must lead
 The captive to the court, where he may meet
 His fellows, find his station, and put on
 The habit he must wear.

THOAS.

Do I hear rightly ?
 Must an Athenian warrior's free-born limbs
 Be clad in withering symbols of the power
 By which man marks his property in flesh,
 Bones, sinews, feelings, lying Nature framed
 For human ? They shall rend me piecemeal first !

HYLLUS.

Thoas—friend—comrade,—recollect thy word,
Which now to break were worse disgrace than power
Can fix upon thee, bids thee bear awhile
This idle shame. I shall be proud to walk
A listener at thy side, while generous thoughts
And arts of valour, which may make them deeds,
Enrich my youth. Soon shall we 'scape the court,
Ply the small bark upon the summer sea,
Gay careless voyagers, who leave the shore
With all its vain distinctions, for a world
Of dancing foam and light; till eve invites
To some tall cavern, where the sea-nymphs raise
Sweet melodies; there shalt thou play the prince,
And I will put thy slavish vestments on,
And yield thee duteous service;—in our sport
Almost as potent as light Fortune is,
Who in her wildest freaks but shifts the robe
Of circumstance, and leaves the hearts it cloath'd
Unchanged and free as ours.

THOAS.

I cannot speak.

Come—or mine eyes will witness me a slave
To my own frailty's masterdom.—Come on!

[To LYCUS.

Thou hast done thy office gently. Lead the way. [*Exeunt.*

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

A Court in the Palace of CREON.

Enter CREON and LYCUS.

CREON.

How does the proud Athenian bear his part
In servile duty?

LYCUS.

I have never seen
So brave a patience. The severest toils
Look graceful in him, from the facile skill
With which his strength subdues them. Few his words
By question drawn, yet gentle as a child's ;
And if, in pauses of his work, his eye
Will glisten, and his bosom heave ; anon
He starts as from a dream, submissive bows,
And plies his work again.

CREON.

Thou dost espouse
His cause. Beware! he hurl'd defiance on me,
Disdain'd my age, as if his pride of strength
Made him in bondage greater than a king
Sick and infirm as I am ; he shall feel

What yet an old man can inflict. He comes ;
Why does he leave his duty ?

LYCUS.

'Tis the hour

Of rest—of food, if he would take it ; here
He's privileged to walk.

CREON.

Let's stand aside.

[CREON and LYCUS retire from sight.

Enter THOAS, *in the dress of a Slave.*

THOAS.

Had I been born to greatness, or achieved
My fame, methinks that I could smile at this ;
Taste a remember'd sweetness in the thought
Of pleasure snatch'd from fate ; or feed my soul
With the high prospect of serene renown
Beetling above this transitory shame
In distant years. But to be wither'd thus—
In the first budding of my fortune, doom'd
To bear the death of hope, and to outlive it !
Gods, keep me patient ! I will to my task.

[*Going.*

Re-enter CREON and LYCUS.

LYCUS.

Wilt thou not join thy fellows at the feast,
And taste a cup of wine the king vouchsafes
For merriment to-day ?

THOAS.

What ! are they merry ?

LYCUS.

Dost thou not hear them ?

THOAS.

They are slaves, indeed !

Forgive me, I would rather to the quarry. [Going.]

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER (*addressing* CREON).

My lord, the games in honour of our triumph
Await thee,—first the chariot race, in which
Thy son prepares to strive. The wrestlers next—

CREON.

Let them begin. [Exit Messenger.]

Methinks yon captive's strength,
No longer rebel, might afford us sport.
Thoas !

THOAS.

I wait thy pleasure.

CREON.

Thou wert train'd
Doubtless, at home, to manly exercise,
And I would have thee show the youth of Corinth
How the Athenians throw the quoit and wrestle.

THOAS.

My lord, I cannot do it !

CREON.

One so strong
As thou, had he been native here, would joy
In sports like these.

THOAS.

O, have I not enjoy'd them !
My lord, I am content to toil and mourn—
'Tis the slave's part ; these limbs are thine to use
In vilest service till their sinews fail ;
But not a nerve shall bend in sports I lov'd
When freeman to indulge in, for the gaze
Of those who were my foes and are my masters.

Enter Messenger, in haste.

MESSENGER.

My lord—the prince—

THOAS.

Is he in peril ?

MESSENGER.

As his chariot, far
Before all rivals, glitter'd to the goal,
The coursers plung'd as if some fearful thing
Unseen by human eyes had glar'd on theirs ;
Then with a speed like lightning flash'd, along
The verge of the dark precipice which girds
The rock-supported plain, and round it still

In frightful circles whirl the youth ; no power
Of man can stay them.

THOAS.

Friend, I come ! I come !

LYCUS. [*Attempting to stop him.*]

Thou must not go.

THOAS.

Away ! I'm master now. [*Rushes out.*]

CREON.

My son ! my son ! I shall embrace thy corpse,
And lie beside it. Yet I cannot bear
This anguish ; dead or living, I will seek thee ! [*Exit.*]

LYCUS. [*Looking out.*]

How the slave spurns the dust ; with what a power
He cleaves the wondering throng,—they hide him now,—
Speed him, ye gods of Corinth !

Enter CREUSA.

CREUSA.

Whence that cry
Of horror mingled with my brother's name ?
Is he in danger ? Wherefore dost thou stand
Thus silently, and gaze on empty air ?
Speak !

Enter IPHITUS. [*CREUSA addressing him.*]

From thy sacred lips the truth
Must flow.

IPHITUS.

Be calm ; thy brother is preserv'd ;
Urg'd by his furious steeds, his chariot hung
Scarce pois'd on the rock's margin, where the vale
Lies deepest under it ; an instant more,
And Hyllus, who serenely stood with eyes
Fix'd on the heavens, had perish'd ; when a form
With god-like swiftness clove the astonish'd crowd ;
Appear'd before the coursers, scarce upheld
By tottering marl ;—strain'd forward o'er the gulf
Of vacant ether ; caught the floating reins,
And drew them into safety with a touch
So fine, that sight scarce witness'd it. The prince
Is in his father's arms.

CREUSA.

Thou dost not speak
The hero's name ;—yet can I guess it well.

IPHITUS.

Thoas.—He comes.

CREUSA.

Let me have leave to thank him.

[*Exeunt* IPHITUS and LYCUS.]

Enter THOAS.

Hero ! accept a maiden's fervent thanks,
All that she has to offer, for a life
Most precious to her.

THOAS.

Speak not of it, fair one !

Life, in my estimate, 's too poor a boon
To merit thanks so rich.

CREUSA.

Not such a life

As his to me. We both together drew
Our earliest breath, and one unconscious crime
Shar'd ; for the hour that yielded us to day
Snatch'd her who bore us. Thence attach'd we grew,
As if some portion of that mother's love
Each for the other cherish'd ; twin-born joys,
Hopes, fancies, and affections, each hath watch'd
In the clear mirror of the other's soul,
By that sweet union doubled. Thou hast sav'd
Two lives in saving Hyllus.

THOAS.

'Tis not meet

That such a wretch as I, in garb like this,

[Looking at his dress, and shuddering.]

Should listen to the speech of one so fair ;
It will unfit me for my tasks.

CREUSA.

Thy tasks ?

O hard injustice !

Enter HYLLUS, CREUSA meeting him.

Brother, join thy thanks
To mine. [HYLLUS and CREUSA embrace.

THOAS.

No more. [Retiring.

Grant, ye immortal gods,
So beautiful a bond be never broken !

[Exit THOAS.

CREUSA.

He speaks of tasks. My brother, can'st endure
To see a hero who hath twice preserv'd
Thy life—upon whose forehead virtue sits
Enthron'd in regal majesty—thus held
In vilest thraldom ?

HYLLUS.

Ah ! my sweet Creusa,
Thy words breathe more than gratitude.

CREUSA.

My brother,
I pray thee, do not look into my face.

HYLLUS.

Nay, raise thy head, and let thine eye meet mine ;
It reads no anger there. Thy love is pure
And noble as thyself, and nobly plac'd ;
And one day shall be honor'd.

CREUSA.

Spare me !

HYLLUS.

Come,

The banquet hath begun ; the king expects us.

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.

Banqueting-Hall in CREON'S Palace.

CREON, ISMENE, IPHITUS, CALCHAS, and *Corinthians.*
seated at the Banquet.

CREON.

[*Rising.*]

I thank ye for my son ;—he is unharm'd,
And soon will join our revelry.

ISMENE.

We lack
Attendance. Where is Thoas ? It were fit
In Corinth's day of triumph, *he* should wait
On his victorious enemies. Go seek him.

[*Exit an Attendant.*]

CREON.

I would have spar'd his services to-day ;
He is but young in service, and hath done

A glorious deed. Drink round, my friends, and pledge
My son once more.

ISMENE.

My sovereign, I should deem
So great a master in the skill to tame
The nature struggling in a free-born soul,
Would think it wisdom to begin betimes,
When an Athenian spirit should be stifled.
If thou would'st bend him to the yoke, 'twere best
Commence to-day ;—to-morrow 't may be vain.

Enter THOAS.

Athenian !—slave !—'tis well that thou hast come ;
Else might we fear thou didst not feel so proud
As such a man as thou should feel, to wait
Upon his victor. Carry round the cup,
And bear it to the king, with duteous looks.

THOAS.

I will endeavour, lady.

[Takes the cup, and speaking aside.

They will join
In very openness of heart, to cast
This shame upon me ; take the mantling cup
With thoughtless pleasure from a warrior's hand,
And smile to see it quiver ; bless the wine
With household names, sweet thoughts of friends afar,

Or love which death hath hallowed ; and while springs
Of cordial joy are quicken'd by the draught,
Will bid affections, generous as their own,
Shrink, agonize, and wither !

ISMENE.

Slave ! attend !

Enter HYLLUS *and* CREUSA.

CREON.

Hyllus, our friends have pledg'd thee ; take thy place,
And thank them.

HYLLUS.

[*Advancing.*]

I am grateful.—Thoas, thus ?

CREON.

We blam'd thy absence, daughter. Sit beside
The queen.

CREUSA.

A humbler place befits me, father.

[*Sits at the end of the circle.*]

[*THOAS attempts to hand the cup.*]

CREUSA.

[*To* HYLLUS.

Brother, dost see ?

HYLLUS. [*Aside to* THOAS, *taking the
cup from him.*]

Thoas, I blush at this ;

Give me the cup.—Corinthian citizens,

This is a moment when I cannot trust
 The grace of serving you to any hand
 Except mine own. The wine will send a glow
 Of rare delight when minister'd by one
 Who hath this day touch'd life's extremest verge,
 And been most bravely rescued.

[HYLLUS *hands the cup.*

ISMENE.

Will the king
 Permit this mockery?

CREON.

Foolish stripling, cease!
 Let the slave hand the cup; and having pass'd
 Another round, fill high, for I will pour
 A great libation out, with such a prayer
 As every heart shall echo while the dust
 Of Corinth drinks it in.

[THOAS *takes the cup, and approaches CREUSA.*

CREUSA.

Nay, tremble not.
 Think thou dost pay free courtesy to one
 Who in the fulness of a grateful heart,
 Implores the gods to cherish thee with hope
 For liberty and honour.

THOAS.

Words so sweet
 Reward and o'erpay all.

CREON.

Corinthians, rise !

Before the gods, who have this day espoused
The cause of Corinth, I this votive cup
Pour with one glorious prayer—Ruin to Athens !

[THOAS dashes down the cup he is about to hand to the King.]

THOAS.

Ruin to Athens ! who dares echo that ?
Who first repeats it dies. These limbs are arm'd
With vigour from the gods that watch above
Their own immortal offspring. Do ye dream,
Because chance lends ye one insulting hour,
That ye can quench the purest flame the gods
Have lit from heaven's own fire ?

HYLLUS. [*Trying to appease the
guests.*]

'Tis ecstasy—

Some phrenzy shakes him.

THOAS.

No ! I call the gods,
Who bend attentive from their azure thrones,
To witness to the truth of that which throbs
Within me now. 'Tis not a city crown'd
With olive and enrich'd with peerless fanes
Ye would dishonour, but an opening world
Diviner than the soul of man hath yet

Been gifted to imagine—truths serene,
 Made visible in beauty, that shall glow
 In everlasting freshness ; unapproach'd
 By mortal passion ; pure amidst the blood
 And dust of conquests ; never waxing old ;
 But on the stream of time, from age to age,
 Casting bright images of heavenly youth
 To make the world less mournful. I behold them !
 And ye, frail insects of a day, would quaff
 “ Ruin to Athens ! ”

CREON.

Are ye stricken all
 To statues, that ye hear these scornful boasts,
 And do not seize the traitor ? Bear him hence,
 And let the executioner's keen steel
 Prevent renewal of this outrage.

IPHITUS.

Hold !
 Some god hath spoken through him.

ISMENE.

Priest ! we need
 No counsel from thee.

HYLLUS.

Father, he will bend—
 'Twas madness—was't not, Thoas ?—answer *me* :
 Retract thy words !

THOAS.

I've spoken, and I'll die.

ISMENE.

'Twere foolish clemency to end so soon
The death-pangs of a slave who thus insults
The king of Corinth. I can point a cell
Deep in the rock, where he may wait thy leisure
To frame his tortures.

HYLLUS.

[To CREON.]

If thou wilt not spare,
Deal with him in the light of day, and gaze
Thyself on what thou dost, but yield him not
A victim to that cold and cruel heart.

ISMENE.

[*Aside.*]

Cold! I must bear that too. (*Aloud.*) Thou hear'st him,
king;
Thou hear'st the insolence, which waxes bolder
Each day, as he expects thy lingering age
Will yield him Corinth's throne.

CREON.

Ungrateful boy!

Go, wander alien from my love; avoid
The city's bounds; and if thou dare return
Till I proclaim thy pardon, think to share
The fate of the rash slave for whom thou plead'st.

THOAS.

King, I will grovel in the dust before thee ;
Will give these limbs to torture ; nay, will strain
Their free-born sinews for thy very sport,
So thou recall the sentence on thy son.

CREON.

Thou wilt prolong his exile. To thy cell ! [To THOAS.
There wait thy time of death ;—my heart is sick—
But I have spoken.

HYLLUS.

Come with me, sweet sister,
And take a dearer parting than this scene
Admits. Look cheerily ;—I leave thy soul
A duty which shall lift it from the sphere
Of sighs and tremblings. Father, may the gods
So cherish thee that thou may'st never mourn,
With more than fond regret, the loss of one
Whose love stays with thee ever.

[*Exeunt* HYLLUS and CREUSA.

IPHITUS.

[*Offering to support* CREON.

Hold ! he faints !

CREON.

No ;—I can walk unaided—rest will soothe me.

[*Exit* CREON.

ISMENE.

Good night, my friends !

[*Exeunt all but ISMENE, THOAS, and CALCHAS.*

Thou, Calchas, wait and guard
The prisoner to his cell. Thou know'st the place.

THOAS.

Lead on.

ISMENE.

[*Coming to the front to THOAS.*

Thou wilt not sleep?

THOAS.

I wish no sleep
To reach these eyes, till the last sleep of all.

ISMENE.

Others may watch as well as thou.

THOAS.

Strange words
Thou speakest, fearful woman ; are they mockeries ?
Methinks they sound too solemn.

ISMENE.

Said I not,
I am of Athens ? Hush ! These walls have echoes ;
Thy gaoler is of Athens, too ; at midnight
He shall conduct thee where we may discourse
In safety. Wilt thou follow him ?

THOAS.

I will.

ISMENE.

'Tis well. Conduct the prisoner to his dungeon.
Remember, thou hast promis'd me.

THOAS.

My blood
Is cold as ice ; yet will I keep the faith
I plight to thee.

[*Exeunt* THOAS and CALCHAS.

ISMENE (*alone*).

It is the heroic form
Which I have seen in watching, and in sleep
Frightfully broken, through the long, long, years
Which I have wasted here in chains, more sad
Than those which bind the death-devoted slave
To his last stony pillow. Fiery shapes,
That have glar'd in upon my bed to mock
My soul with hopes of vengeance, keep your gaze
Fix'd stedfast on me now ! My hour is nigh !

[*Exit.*

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

The Dungeon in the Rock.

THOAS *discovered, alone.*

THOAS.

Ye walls of living rock, whose time-shed stains
Attest that ages have revolv'd since hands
Of man were arm'd to pierce your solid frame,
And, from your heart of adamant, hew out
Space for his fellow's wretchedness, I hail
A refuge in your stillness; tyranny
Will not stretch forth its palsied arm to fret
Its captive here. Ye cannot clasp me round
With darkness so substantial, as can shut
The airy visions from me which foreshew
The glories Athens will achieve, when I
Am passionless as ye. I hear a step!
It is that mournful lady's minister,
Who comes to waken feelings I would bid
For ever sleep. A light, as of a star,
Gleams in the narrow cavern's steep descent;

And now a form, as of a goddess, glides
To illuminate its blackness. 'Tis Creusa!
My heart is not yet stone.

Enter CREUSA.

I venture here
Thus boldly to perform a holy office,
Which should have been my brother's.—When he fled
The city of his nurture, his last thoughts
Were bent on his preserver; he bequeathed
His strong injunction never to forsake
The aim of thy deliverance. I exult
That heaven thus far has prosper'd it; be quick,
And follow me to freedom.

THOAS.

Did'st thou say
To freedom, lovely one?

CREUSA.

If thou wilt haste;
The path is clear; the city wrapt in sleep;
I know the pass-word at the gates—how learn'd
By quaint device, I'll tell thee when we meet
In safety,—if we ever meet again!

THOAS.

And dost thou wish it?

CREUSA.

Do I wish it? Yes!

And on the swift fulfilment of that wish
My life is wager'd.

THOAS.

There is more than life
To me in these sweet words—speak them again—
But no ;—once heard they linger on the ear
Which drank them in, for ever. Shapeless rocks
That witness to the sound, rejoice! No fane
Of alabaster while the breeze has slept
In circling myrtles, and the moon disclos'd
Young love's first blush to the rapt eyes of him
Whose happy boldness rais'd it, rivals you
In sanctity which rich affection lends
To things of earthly mould. Methinks ye spring
Rounded to columns; your dank mists are curl'd
Upwards in heavenly shapes, and breathe perfume,
While every niche which caught the music speeds
Delicious echoes to the soul. 'Twere bliss
To dwell for ever here.

CREUSA.

O linger not ;
The watch will change at midnight.

THOAS.

Midnight—Jove !—

I cannot go.

CREUSA.

Not go ! I ask no thanks—

No recompense—no boon,—save the delight
Of saving thee ; for this I've perill'd all—
Life, freedom, fame,—and now thou tell'st me, proud one,
That I have perill'd all in vain.

THOAS.

Forbear,
In mercy ; I have pledg'd my word to wait
A messenger the Queen will send at midnight,
To bring me to her presence.

CREUSA.

To the Queen ?
What would she with thee ? She is steel'd 'gainst nature ;
I never knew her shed a tear, nor heard
A sigh break from her,—oft she seeks a glen
Hard by the temple of avenging Jove,
Which sinks mid blasted rocks, whose narrow gorge
Scarce gives the bold explorer space ; its sides,
Glistening in marble blackness, rise aloft
From the scant margin of a pool, whose face
No breeze e'er dimpled ; in its furthest shade
A cavern yawns, where poisonous vapours rise
That none may enter it and live ; they spread
Their rolling films of ashy white like shrouds
Around the fearful orifice, and kill
The very lichens which the earthless stone
Would nurture ;—whether evil men, or things

More terrible, meet this sad lady there,
I know not—she will lead thee thither !

THOAS.

No—

Not if guilt point the way, if it be sorrow
I must endure it rather than the curse
Which lies upon the faithless heart of him
Who breaks a promise plighted to the wretched ;
For she *is* wretched.

CREUSA.

So am I. Methinks
I am grown selfish ; for it is not suffering
I dread should fall upon thee, but I tremble
Lest witchery of that awful woman's grief
Lead thee to some rash deed. Thou art a soldier,
A young proficient in the game of death,
And mayst be wrought on—

THOAS.

Do not fear for me ;
Where shews of glory beckon I'll not wait
To pluck away the radiant masks and find
Death under them ; but at the thought of blood
Shed save in hottest fight, my spirit shrinks
As from some guilt not aim'd at human things
But at the majesty of gods.

CREUSA.

Forgive me ;

It was a foolish terror swept across
My soul,—I should not have forgot 'twas mercy
That made thee captive.

Voice without.

Thoas !

THOAS.

I am call'd.

The voice came that way—still thy upward path
Is open—haste—he must not find thee here.

CREUSA.

My prayers—all that the weak can give--are thine.

Farewell !

[*Exit.*

THOAS.

The gods for ever guard thee !

She glides away—she gains the topmost ridge—
She's safe. Now can I welcome fate with bosom
Steel'd to endure the worst.

Voice without.

Thoas !

THOAS.

I come !

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

The Hall of Statues, in CREON'S Palace.

Enter ISMENE.

ISMENE.

Why tarries Calchas? It is past the hour
Of deepest night, when he should hither guide
The avenger of my sorrows. Gods of Athens!
Whom strong expostulation hath compell'd
To look upon my shames, one little hour
I ask your aid; that granted, never more
Shall the constraining force of passion break
Your dread repose. I hear a warrior's step—
Ye answer, and ye bless me.

Enter CALCHAS and THOAS.

It is well.

[*To CALCHAS.*

Withdraw, and wait without. I must confer
With this unyielding man, alone.

[*Exit CALCHAS.*

THOAS.

I wait

To learn thy will;—why thou hast bid me leave
The stubborn rock, where I had grown as dull,
As painless, as the cell to which thy breath
Consign'd me?—thou, who urg'd the king to wreak

His most inglorious spleen on one too low
To be mark'd out for anger, too resolv'd
To heed it !

ISMENE.

I beheld in thee a soldier,
Born of that glorious soil whose meanest son
Is nobler than barbarian kings, with arm
Worthy to serve a daughter, who has claim
On its best blood. But there is softness in thee,
Weakening thy gallant nature, which may need
The discipline of agony and shame
To master it. Hast thou already learn'd
Enough to steel thee for a generous deed ;
Or shall I wait till thou hast linger'd long
In sorrow's mighty school ? I'm mistress in it,
And know its lessons well.

THOAS.

If thou hast aught
Of honor to suggest, I need no more
To fit me for thy purpose ; if thy aim
Hath taint of treachery or meanness in it,
I think no pain will bend me to thy will ;
At least, I pray the gods so !

ISMENE.

Had'st thou borne
Long years of lingering wretchedness like mine,
Thou would'st not play the casuist thus. 'Tis well

For lusty youth, that casts no glance beyond
 To-morrow's fight or game, which values life
 A gewgaw, to be perill'd at a plunge
 From some tall rock into an eddying gulph,
 For the next revel's glory, to collect
 The blood into the cheek, and bravely march
 Amidst admiring people to swift death,
 And call its heedlessness of what it yields—
 A sacrifice heroic. But who knows,
 Who guesses, save the woman that endures,
 What 'tis to pine each weary day in forms
 All counterfeit;—each night to seek a couch
 Throng'd by the phantoms of revenge, till age
 Find her in all things weaken'd, save the wish,
 The longing of the spirit, which laughs out
 In mockery of the withering frame! O Thoas,
 I have endured all this—I, who am sprung
 From the great race of Theseus!

THOAS.

From the race
 Of Theseus!—of the godlike man whose name
 Hath shone upon my childhood as a star
 With magic power?

ISMENE.

Reduc'd to basest needs
 By slow decay in Attica, array'd

In hateful splendour here, I bear small trace
 Of whence I sprung. No matter—spurn'd—disown'd
 By living kindred, I have converse held
 With those of my great family whom Death
 Hath stripp'd of all but glory; and they wait
 The triumph of this hour to hail me theirs.

THOAS.

Shame to our city, who allowed a matron
 Of that great race to languish!

ISMENE.

Let it pass;
 A single grief—a short and casual wrong—
 Which—in that sense of ages past and hopes
 Resplendent for the future, which are center'd
 In the great thought of country, and make rich
 The poorest citizen who feels a share
 In her—is nothing. Had she sought my blood,
 To mingle with the dust before the rush
 Of some triumphant entry, I had shed it;
 And while my life gush'd forth, had tasted joy
 Akin to her rapt hero's. 'Tis thy lot—
 Thy glorious lot—to give me all I live for,—
 Freedom and vengeance.

THOAS.

What would'st have me do?

ISMENE.

I have not wasted all the shows of power
 Which mock'd my grief, but used them to conceal
 The sparks which tyrant fickleness had lit,
 And sloth had left to smoulder. In the depths
 Of neighbouring caverns, foes of Creon meet
 Who will obey thee ; lead them thence to-night—
 Surprise the palace—slay this hated king,—
 Or bear him as a slave to Athens.

THOAS.

Never !

I am a foe to Corinth—not a traitor,
 Nor will I league with treason. In the love
 Of my own land, I honour his who cleaves
 To the scant graces of the wildest soil,
 As I do to the loveliness, the might,
 The hope, of Athens. Aught else man can do,
 In honor, shall be thine.

ISMENE.

I thought I knew
 Athenians well ; and yet, thy speech is strange.
 Whence drew thou these affections,—whence these thoughts
 Which reach beyond a soldier's sphere ?

THOAS.

From Athens ;
 Her groves ; her halls ; her temples ; nay, her streets
 Have been my teachers. I had else been rude,

For I was left an orphan, in the charge
Of an old citizen, who gave my youth
Rough though kind nurture. Fatherless, I made
The city and her skies my home; have watch'd
Her various aspects with a child's fond love;
Hung in chill morning o'er the mountain's brow,
And, as the dawn broke slowly, seen her grow
Majestic from the darkness, till she fill'd
The sight and soul alike; enjoy'd the storm
Which wrapt her in the mantle of its cloud,
While every flash that shiver'd it reveal'd
Some exquisite proportion, pictur'd once
And ever to the gazer;—stood entranc'd
In rainy moonshine, as, one side, uprose
A column'd shadow, ponderous as the rock
Which held the Titan groaning with the sense
Of Jove's injustice; on the other, shapes
Of dreamlike softness drew the fancy far
Into the glistening air; but most I felt
Her loveliness, when summer-evening tints
Gave to my lonely childhood sense of home.

ISMENE.

And was no spot amidst that radiant waste
A home to thee indeed?

THOAS.

The hut which held
My foster-father had for me no charms,

Save those his virtues shed upon its rudeness.
 I lived abroad ;—and yet there is a spot
 Where I have felt that faintness of the heart
 Which traces of oblivious childhood bring
 Upon ripe manhood ; where small heaps of stones,
 Blacken'd by fire, bear witness to a tale
 Of rapine which destroyed my mother's cot,
 And bore her thence to exile.

ISMENE.

Mighty gods !

Where stand these ruins ?

THOAS.

On a gentle slope.

Broken by workings of an ancient quarry,
 About a furlong from the western gate,
 Stand these remains of penury ; one olive,
 Projecting o'er the cottage site which fire
 Had blighted, with two melancholy stems,
 Stream'd o'er its meagre vestiges.

ISMENE.

'Tis plain !

Hold ! hold ! my courage. Let the work be done,
 And then I shall aspire. I must not wait
 Another hour for vengeance. Dreadful powers !
 Who on the precipice's side at eve
 Have bid gigantic shadows greyly pass
 Before my mortal vision,—dismal forms

Of a fate-stricken race—I see HIM now,
Whom ye led follower of your ghastly train—
O nerve him for his office !

THOAS.

Fearful woman,
Speak thy command, if thou would have it reach
A conscious ear; for whilst thou gazest thus,
My flesh seems hardening into stone; my soul
Is tainted; thought of horror courses thought
Like thunder-clouds swept wildly;—yet I feel
That I must do thy bidding.

ISMENE.

It is well;—
Hast thou a weapon?

THOAS.

Yes; the generous prince,
When I resign'd my arms, left me a dagger.

ISMENE.

The prince! The Furies sent it by his hand,
For justice on his father.

THOAS.

On thy husband?

ISMENE.

Husband! Beware!—my husband moulders yet
Within his rusting armour; such a word

From thee may pierce the rock beneath whose shade
 He fell, and curse him with a moment's life
 To blast thee where we stand. If this slight king,
 In the caprice of tyranny was pleas'd
 To deck me out in regal robes, dost think
 That in his wayward smiles, or household taunts,
 I can forget the wretchedness and shame
 He hurl'd upon me once ?

THOAS.

What shame ?

ISMENE.

What shame !

Thou hast not heard it. Listen ! I was pluck'd
 From the small pressure of an only babe,
 And in my frenzy, sought the hall where Creon
 Drain'd the frank goblet ; fell upon my knees ;
 Embrac'd his foot-stool with my hungry arms,
 And shriek'd aloud for liberty to seek
 My infant's ashes, or to hear some news
 Of how it perish'd ;—Creon did not deign
 To look upon me, but with reckless haste
 Dash'd me to earth ;—yes ; this disgrace he cast
 On the proud daughter of a line which trac'd
 Its skiey lineage to the gods, and bore
 The impress of its origin,—on me,
 A woman, and a mother !

THOAS.

Let me fly

And whet Athenian anger with thy wrongs—
My thoughts are strange and slaughterous.

ISMENE.

[*After a pause.*

Fly then! Yes!—

(*Aside.*) 'T will be as certain.—I will point a way
Will lead thee through a chamber to the terrace,
Whence thou may'st reach the wall. Thy only peril
Lies in that chamber. Mark me well;—if there
An arm be rais'd to stay thee—if a voice
Be heard—or if aught mortal meet thy sight,
Whate'er the form, thy knife is pledged to quench
The life that breathes there.

THOAS.

I obey. Farewell!

[*He takes her hand; she shivers; and drops it.*

ISMENE.

Hold off thy hand—it thrills me.—Swear!

THOAS.

By those

Who hover o'er us now, I swear!

ISMENE.

Be firm.

That is the door;—thou canst not miss the path.
Is thy steel ready?

THOAS.

Yes;—my breast is cold
As is that steel.

ISMENE.

Haste—the thick darkness wanes.

[*Exit* THOAS.]

Infernal powers! I thank ye—all is paid—
By thousand ecstasies in which my soul
Grows wanton. Calchas!

Enter CALCHAS.

Wish me joy, old servant!
What dost thou think of him who left me now?

CALCHAS.

A gallant soldier.

ISMENE.

'Tis my son—my own!
The very child for whom I knelt to Creon,
Is sent to give me justice. He is gone,
Arm'd with a dagger, thro' the royal chamber,
Sworn to strike any that may meet him there
A corpse before him. Dost thou think the king
Will see to-morrow?

CALCHAS.

He may slumber.

ISMENE.

No—

He hath sent his son to exile—he will wake—
I'm sure he will. There ! listen !—'twas a groan !
'Twill be but low—again ! 'Tis finish'd ! Shades
Of my immortal ancestry, look down,
And own me of your kindred !—Calchas, haste ;
Secure possession of the towers that guard
The city gates :—entrust them to our friends,
Who, when I give the word, will set them wide.
Haste, 'tis thy final labour. I shall soon
Be potent to reward the friends who clove
To me in my sad bondage.

CALCHAS.

Whither go'st thou ?

ISMENE.

To the pale shrine of her whose withering shield
Is dedicate to Athens. I have pray'd
At coldest midnight there, without a hope
Which might give ardour to my freezing veins.
I ask her to allay my raptures now,
By touch of marble—I require its chillness.
There I'll await the issue. It is sure !

[*Exeunt* ISMENE and CALCHAS.]

SCENE III.

The Outskirts of a Wood on one side ; the Athenian Camp on the other. A Watch-fire at a little distance, lighting the Scene.

PENTHEUS (*walking backwards and forwards as a Guard*).

The cold grey dawn begins to glimmer ; speed it,
 Ye powers that favour Athens ! From the sea,
 Her everlasting guardian, Phœbus, rise,
 To pour auspicious radiance o'er the field,
 In which she may efface the foul dishonour
 Her arms own'd yesterday. Not shame alone,
 But loss no morrow can repair, is hers !
 Archas, our army's noble leader, sleeps
 Beneath the pressure of a thousand shields ;
 And Thoas, bravest of our youth, a slave—
 Perchance, ere this a corpse. Friend whom I loved,
 In whose advancing glories I grew proud
 As though they had been mine—if yet thou breathest,
 I will deliver, and if dead, avenge thee !
 O, Thoas !

Enter THOAS wildly, from the Wood.

THOAS.

Who pronounc'd that wretched name,—
 That name no honest tongue may utter more ?
 Pentheus !

PENTHEUS.

Thoas ! most welcome. Thou art come in time
To share a glorious conflict. Ha ! thine eyes
Glare with a frightful light ;—be calm,—thou art safe ;—
This is the camp of those who will reward
Thy great emprise of yesterday, with place
Among the foremost in the battle. Come
To my exulting heart. [*Offering to embrace* THOAS.

THOAS.

No !—hold me from thee !—
My heart can ne'er know fellowship again
With such as thine ; for I have paid a price
For this vile liberty to roam abroad,
And cry to woods and rocks that answer me
With fearful echoes :—such a price, my Pentheus—
My own unspotted conscience. Dost not see
Foul spots of blood upon this slave's apparel,
Polluting e'en that dress ?

PENTHEUS.

If thou hast struck
Some soldier down to vindicate thy freedom,
Who shall accuse thee ?

THOAS.

'Twas no soldier, Pentheus ;
No stout opponent that my fatal knife
Dismiss'd to Erebus. A wither'd hand,

As from an old man, in the gloom stretch'd forth,
 Scarce met my touch,—which could not have delay'd
 My course an instant ;—'twas no thought of fear,
 No haste for freedom, urged me,—but an oath
 Glar'd on my soul in characters of flame,
 And madden'd me to strike. I rais'd my arm,
 And wildly hurl'd my dagger ;—nought but air
 It seem'd to meet ;—but a sharp feeble sigh,
 Such as death urges when it stops the gasp
 Of wasting age, assur'd me it had done
 A murderer's office.

PENTHEUS.

Think not of it thus :—
 Thy lips are parch'd,—let me fetch water.

THOAS.

No !

I have drank fiercely at a mountain spring,
 And left the stain of blood in its pure waters ;
 It quench'd my mortal thirst, and I rejoic'd,
 For I seem'd grown to demon, till the stream
 Cool'd my hot throat, and then I laugh'd aloud,
 To find that I had something human still.

PENTHEUS.

Fret not thy noble heart with what is past.

THOAS.

No !—'tis not past !—the murderer has no PAST ;
 But one eternal PRESENT.

HYLLUS. [*Within the wood.*]

Help me !—answer !—

THOAS.

The voice of Hyllus !—of that noble youth,
 Who, for my sake, is outcast from his home,
 So near the camp of Athens ! Should our guards
 Arrest him, he will perish. Friend ! That voice
 Comes on my ear like that of one who serv'd me,
 In yonder city ; leave thy watch to me
 A moment.

PENTHEUS.

No—thy passion's dangerous ;
 I dare not trust it.

THOAS.

See—I have subdu'd
 The pang which wrung me. By our ancient loves
 Grant me this boon—perhaps the last.

PENTHEUS.

Be quick,
 For the watch presently will be remov'd,
 And the trump call to battle. [*Exit PENTHEUS.*]

THOAS. [*Calling to HYLLUS.*]

Here ! The hope
 Of saving Hyllus wafts into my soul
 A breath of comfort.

Enter HYLLUS.

HYLLUS.

I have lost my path,
Wandering the dismal night in this old wood ;
I'd seek the coast ; canst thou point out the way ?

THOAS.

Avoid it—on each side the Isthmus, ships
Of Athens ride at anchor.

HYLLUS. [*Recognising him.*

Thoas ! free—
Then I am bless'd, and I can bear my lot,
However hard ;—I guess the hand that op'd
The dungeon door ;—how didst thou quit the palace ?

THOAS.

Why dost thou ask me that ? Through a large chamber
That open'd on a terrace—'twas all dark ;—
Tell me who lay there ?

HYLLUS.

'Tis my father's chamber,
Did he awake ?

THOAS.

Thy father ?—gods ! The king ?
The feeble old man with the reverend hair ?
Art sure he rested there ?

HYLLUS.

Sure. No one else
May enter after sunset, save the queen.

THOAS.

The queen ! all's clear ;—Jove strike me into marble !

HYLLUS.

Why dost thou tremble so ? as if a fit
Of ague shook thee.

THOAS.

Nothing—only thought
Of my past danger came upon my soul
And shook it strangely. Was the old man there ?

[Stands abstractedly as stupefied.]

PENTHEUS.

[Without.]

Thoas !

THOAS.

Haste !—Do not lose a moment—fly !
The watch-fire that is waning now is fed
By hands which, madden'd by the foul defeat
Of yesterday, will slay thee.

HYLLUS.

Whither fly ?

The camp of Athens is before me ;—ships
Of Athens line the coasts,—and Corinth's king

Hath driven me forth an exile. I'll return
And crave my father's pardon.

THOAS.

No—not there—
Yet, where should the poor stripling go? O Jove!
When he shall learn—

HYLLUS.

Farewell—yet hold an instant!—
Wilt thou not send some message to Creusa,
That she may greet her brother with a smile?

THOAS.

Creusa smile!—Methinks I see her now—
Her form expands—her delicate features grow
To giant stone; her hairs escape their band,
And stream aloft in air;—and now they take
The forms of fiery serpents—how they hiss—
And point their tongues at Thoas!

HYLLUS.

This is frenzy;
I cannot leave thee thus:—whate'er my fate,
I will attend and soothe thee.

THOAS.

Soothe me!—Boy,
Wouldst haunt me with that face which now I see
Is like thy father's. Ha! ha! ha! Thou soothe me—

Look not upon me; by this lurid light
Thou look'st a spectre. Hence, or I will rend thee!

HYLLUS.

I rather would die here.

THOAS.

Fool! fool! away!

[*Exit* HYLLUS.]

He's gone—yet *she* is with me still,—with looks
More terrible than anger;—take away
That patient face,—I cannot bear its sweetness;—
Earth, cover me! [Falls on the ground.]

Enter PENTHEUS.

PENTHEUS.

The troops are arming fast;
They call on thee to lead them.—Hark, the trump—
[The trumpet sounds.]

THOAS.

[Leaps up.]

Yes; I will answer to its call. Again
Thou shalt behold me strike. In yonder field
I'll win that which I hunger for.

PENTHEUS.

A crown
Of laurel which hath floated in thy dreams
From thy brave infancy—

THOAS.

A grave! a grave! [Exit.]

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

The interior of the Funereal Grove at Corinth.

The Urn of CREON.

CREUSA *discovered bending over it.*

CREUSA.

'Tis strange!—I cannot weep for him; I've tried
To reckon every artifice of love
Which mid my father's waywardness proclaim'd
His tenderness unalter'd;—felt again
The sweet caresses infancy receiv'd,
And read the prideful look that made them sweeter,
Have run the old familiar round of things
Indifferent, on which affection hangs
In delicate remembrances which make
Each household custom sacred;—I've recall'd
From Memory's never-failing book of pain,
My own neglects of dutiful regard
'Too frequent—all that should provoke a tear—
And all in vain. My feelings are as dull,
Mine eyes are rigid as when first they met

The horrid vision of his thin white hairs
Matted with blood. Gods! let me know again
A touch of natural grief, or I shall go
Distract, and think the bloody form is here.

Enter HYLLUS.

Hyllus! my brother! thou wilt make me weep,
For we shall mourn as we were lov'd together.
Dost thou know all?

HYLLUS.

Yes, all.—Alas! Creusa,
He died in anger with me.

CREUSA.

Do not dwell
On that sad thought;—but recollect the cause
Was noble—the defence of one whose soul
Claims kindred with thine own.

HYLLUS.

Unhappy sister,
What sorrow stranger than thy present grief
Awaits thee yet! I cannot utter it.

CREUSA.

Speak;—any words of thine will comfort me.

HYLLUS.

I fear thou must no longer link the thoughts
Of nobleness and Thoas.

CREUSA.

Then my soul
Must cease all thinkings ; for I've blended them
Till they have grown inseparate. What is this ?

HYLLUS.

That he hath made us orphans.

CREUSA.

He is free
From such ignoble guiltiness as thou.
What fury shed this thought into a soul
Once proud to be his debtor ?

HYLLUS.

Poor believer
In virtue's dazzling counterfeit, 'tis sad
To undeceive thee. At the break of day
I met the murderer, frantic from his crime,
In anguish which explain'd by after proofs
Attests his guilt.

CREUSA.

And is this all ? Hast said ?
All thou canst urge against the nobleness
Which breathes in every word ? Against thy life
Preserv'd at liberal hazard of his own ?
Against the love which I was proud to bear

For him, and that with which he more than paid me?
He in some frenzy utter'd aimless words,
And thou at once believ'd him guilty. Go!
Haste and accuse him. Henceforth we are twain.

HYLLUS.

Sister, I never will accuse him.

CREUSA.

Take
My thanks for that small promise, though our souls,
While thine is tainted with this foul belief,
Can ne'er be mingled as they have been. Now
I see why I was passionless. Ismene
Bends her steps hither; thou hadst best retire;
She rules the city, for her secret friends
Cast off their masks, and own themselves the foes
Of Corinth's prince.

HYLLUS.

Beside my father's urn
I shall await her.

CREUSA.

I will not expose
My anguish to her cold and scornful gaze;—
Brother, farewell awhile; we are divided,
But I will bless thee.

[*Exit.*]

Enter ISMENE and Guards.

ISMENE.

Wherefore art thou here,
Despite the sentence which the king pronounc'd
Of exile?

HYLLUS.

I have come to mourn a father,
Whose words of passion had been long unsaid,
Had his kind heart still throbb'd; and next, to claim
My heritage.

ISMENE.

Thine!—win it if thou canst——

Enter CALCHAS.

How stands the battle?

CALCHAS.

Corinth's soldiers fly,
Routed in wild disorder. Thoas leads
The troops of Athens, and will soon appear
In triumph at our gates.

ISMENE.

Leads, say'st thou?—leads?
Let Corinth's gates stand open to admit
The hero,—give him conduct to the hall,
Where sculptur'd glories of Corinthian kings

Shall circle him who sham'd them,—there, alone,
I would crave speech with him. [*Exit* CALCHAS.

HYLLUS. [*To the Soldiers.*

My countrymen,
Will ye endure this shame? I am a youth
Unskill'd in war; but I have learn'd to die
When life is infamy. If ye will join me,
We'll close the gates with ramparts of the slain.
Does no heart answer mine?

ISMENE.

Their swords shall curb
Thy idle ravings. Athens triumphs now!—
Attend him to his chamber, and beware
He leaves it not.

HYLLUS.

For this I ought to thank thee:
I would not see my country's foul disgrace;
But thou shalt tremble yet. [*Exit, guarded.*

ISMENE.

Now shall I clasp him—
Clasp him a victor o'er my country's foes;—
The slayer of him most hated. Double transport!
The dream of great revenge I lived upon
Was never bright with image of such joy,
And now comes link'd with vengeance! Thoas, haste!

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

Before the Gates of Corinth.

Shouts without.

*Enter THOAS in armour, with his sword drawn, and
Athenian Soldiers, as in pursuit.*

THOAS.

Here we may breathe awhile from conquest ; 'twas
A noble chase, we scarce may call it battle ;
Success so quick hath followed on success,
That we shall want more time to count our glories
'Than we have spent in winning them. The foe
Is niggard, and will not allow our arms
One day of conflict. We have won too soon.
Grant me, great gods, instead of years of life,
Another such an hour !

SOLDIER.

My lord, here's wine ;
'Tis from the tents of Corinth.

THOAS.

Not a drop.

My heart's too light—too jocund, to allow
Another touch of ecstasy, deriv'd
From mortal fruitage ; nay, were it Jove's nectar,
I'd set the untasted cup of crystal down,
And wait till all our glorious work were finish'd !

Soldiers! we sup in Corinth! You'll not wait
Past time of hunger, if ye are not faint
With rapid conquest.

Enter PENTHEUS and Soldiers.

PENTHEUS.

Noble leader, hail!
Thy country's heroes bless thee with the sense
Of their delighted wonder! With one voice
They greet thee as the winner of this fight,
To which thou led them. Never was a scheme
Of battle, plann'd in council of the sage,
Form'd with a skill more exquisite than that
Which, in the instant thou wert call'd to lead us,
Flash'd on thy spirit, and in lines of fire
From thine was manifest to ours! Art wounded?

THOAS.

A very scratch; I blush to think no more:
Some frolic blood let in the strife had serv'd
To moderate my fervours.

PENTHEUS.

See; our comrades
Have snatched a branch from the Corinthian laurels
(Which now I fear must wither) for a wreath
To grace thy brow! Soldiers, 'tis much I ask;
But when I tell ye I have watch'd your chief

From the first flash that dazzled in his eye
 At tale of glory, ye may yield to me
 The proud delight of offering him this honor.

[*Soldier gives the wreath to PENTHEUS, who gives it to*

THOAS.

PENTHEUS.

I thank ye, comrades.

THOAS.

The immortal gods
 Grant me a double blessing in the friend
 From whom I take this happiness. O, Pentheus!
 I have mus'd fondly—proudly—on the fate
 Which waits upon my country; when the brow
 Which thou wouldst deck, was bar'd to mist and storm;
 When every moonlit fountain which displaced
 The blackness of the moss-grown hillock told
 Of the pure beauty which her name should keep,
 Empearling starless ages; when each wave
 That rippled in her harbour to my ear
 Spoke glad submission to the Queen of Cities;
 But never, 'mid my burning hopes for Athens,
 Did I believe that *I* should stand thus crown'd,
 Her laurell'd soldier! Friends, the sun-light wanes,
 And we must sup in Corinth!

PENTHEUS.

See, the gates

Open to welcome us!

[*The gates open.*

THOAS.

Without a blow ?

We shall not earn our banquet. So expands
Before the vision of my soul, the cast
To the small cluster of our godlike sons.
Let Asia break the mirror of our seas
With thousand sterns of ivory, and cast
The glare of gold upon them to disturb
The azure hue of heaven, they shall be swept
As glittering clouds before the sun-like face
Of unapplianced virtue ! Friends, forgive me ;
I have been used to idle thought, nor yet
Have learn'd to marry it to action. Blest
To-day in both.

PENTHEUS.

A herald from the city.

Enter CALCHAS.

CALCHAS.

I am commission'd by the queen to speak
With Thoas.

THOAS.

I am here.

[Trembles, and supports himself, as paralysed, on

PENTHEUS.

Thou art commission'd
From the infernal powers to cross my path

Of glorious triumph, with a shape that brings
 Before me terrible remembrance, which
 Had strangely vanish'd from me.

PENTHEUS. [To the Soldiers.

He is ill,—

Retire.

THOAS.

No—should the herald fade in air
 He would not leave his office unfulfill'd,
 One look hath smit my soul.

PENTHEUS.

Is this a dream?

THOAS.

No—'tis a dreadful waking—I have dreamt
 Of honour, and have struggled in my dream
 For Athens, as if I deserved to fight
 Unsullied in her cause. The joy of battle
 In eddies as a whirlpool had engulf'd
 The thought of one sad moment, when my soul
 Was blasted; but it rises in the calm,
 Like to a slaughter'd seaman, who pursues
 The murderous vessel which swept proudly on,
 When his death-gurgle ended. Hence, vain wreath!—
 Thou wouldst entwine my brow with serpent coldness,
 And wither instant there. [Tears the wreath.

So vanish all
My hopes; they are gone—I'm fit to answer thee
Who sent thee here? [To CALCHAS.

CALCHAS.

The queen.

THOAS.

A worthy mistress
Of such a slave—thy errand?

CALCHAS.

She who rules
In Corinth now, admits the victor's power,
And bids the gates thus open: she requires
A conference with Thoas in the hall
Next to the royal chamber—thou hast been
There, as I think, my lord.

THOAS.

I know full well,
Lead, dreadful herald, on.

PENTHEUS.

The troops attend
The order of their general.

THOAS.

[To CALCHAS.

Why dost wait?
Thou see'st that I obey thy call.

PENTHEUS.

My friend,
Thy blood is fever'd—thou may'st choose thy time—
Postpone this meeting.

THOAS. [To CALCHAS.

Why dost tarry? turn
Thy face away—it maddens me—go on!

[Exit after CALCHAS.

SOLDIER. [To PENTHEUS.

My lord, we wait for orders; this strange man,
Half warrior and half rhapsodist, may bring
Our army into peril.

PENTHEUS.

Fear it not;

He has all elements of greatness in him,
Although as yet not perfectly commingled,
Which is sole privilege of gods. They cast
Such piteous weakness on the noblest men
That we may feel them mortal. 'Tis a cloud
Which speedily will pass, and thou shalt see
The hero shine as clearly forth in council
As he has done in victory. Meanwhile
He leaves us pleasant duty—form your lines—
Sound trumpets—march triumphant into Corinth!

[The Athenians enter Corinth.

SCENE III.

The Hall of Statues in the Palace, same as in Third Act.

THOAS.

[*Alone.*]

Again I stand within this awful hall ;
I found the entrance here, without the sense
Of vision ; for a foul and clinging mist,
Like the damp vapour of a long-closed vault,
Is round me. Now its objects start to sight
With terrible distinctness ! Crimson stains
Break sudden on the walls ! The fretted roof
Grows living ! Let me hear a human voice,
Or I shall play the madman !

Enter ISMENE, richly dressed.

ISMENE.

Noble soldier,
I bid thee welcome, with the rapturous heart
Of one, for whom thy patriot arm hath wrought
Deliverance and revenge—but more for Athens
Than for myself, I hail thee : why dost droop ?
Art thou oppressed with honours, as a weight
Thou wert not born to carry ? I will tell
That which shall show thee native to the load,

And will requite thee with a joy as great
 As that thou hast conferr'd. Thy life was hid
 Beneath inglorious accident, till force
 Of its strong current urged it forth to day,
 To glisten and expand in sun-light. Know
 That it has issu'd from a fountain great
 As is its destiny.—Thou sharest with me
 The blood of Theseus.

THOAS.

If thy speech is true,
 And I have something in me which responds
 To its high tidings, I am doom'd to bear
 A heavier woe than I believ'd the gods
 Would ever lay on mortal; I have stood
 Unwittingly upon a skiey height,
 By ponderous gloom encircled,—thou hast shown
 The mountain-summit mournfully revers'd
 In the black mirror of a lurid lake,
 Whose waters soon shall cover me,—I've stain'd
 A freeman's nature; thou hast shown it sprung
 From gods and heroes, and wouldst have me proud
 Of the foul sacrilege.

ISMENE.

If that just deed,
 Which thus disturbs thy fancy, were a crime,
 What is it in the range of glorious acts,
 Past and to come, to which thou art allied,

But a faint speck, an atom, which no eye
But thine would dwell on ?

THOAS.

It infests them all,
Spreads out funereal blackness as they pass
In sad review before me. Hadst thou pour'd
This greatness on my unpolluted heart,
How had it bounded ! now it tortures me,
From thee, fell sorceress, who snar'd my soul
Here—in this very hall !—May the strong curse
Which breathes from out the ruins of a nature
Blasted by guilt—

ISMENE.

Hold ! Parricide—forbear !
She whom thou hast aveng'd, she whom the death
Of Creon hath set free, whom thou wouldst curse,
Is she who bore thee !

THOAS.

Thou !

ISMENE.

Dost doubt my word ?
Is there no witness in thy mantling blood
Which tells thee whence 'twas drawn ? Is nature silent ?
If, from the mists of infancy, no form
Of her who, sunk in poverty, forgot
Its ills in tending thee, and made the hopes

Which glimmer'd in thy smiles her comfort,—gleams
 Upon thee yet ;—hast thou forgot the night
 When foragers from Corinth toss'd a brand
 Upon the roof that shelter'd thee ; dragg'd out
 The mother from the hearth-stone where she sat,
 Resign'd to perish, shrieking for the babe
 Whom from her bosom they had rent ? That child
 Now listens. As in rapid flight, I gazed
 Backward upon the blazing ruin, shapes
 Of furies, from amid the fire, look'd out
 And grinn'd upon me. Every weary night
 While I have lain upon my wretched bed,
 They have been with me, pointing to the hour
 Of vengeance. Thou hast wrought it for me, son !
 Embrace thy mother.

THOAS.

Would the solid earth
 Would open, and enfold me in its strong
 And stifling grasp, that I might be as though
 I ne'er was born.

ISMENE.

Dost mock me ? I have clasp'd
 Sorrow and shame as if they were my sons,
 To keep my heart from hardening into stone ;
 The promis'd hour arriv'd ; and when it came,
 The furies, in repayment, sent an arm,

Moulded from mine, to strike the oppressor dead.
I triumph'd,—and I sent thee!

THOAS.

Dost confess
That, conscious who I was, thou urg'd my knife
Against the king?

ISMENE.

Confess!—I glory in it!—
Thy arm hath done the purpose of my will;
For which I bless it. Now I am thy suitor.
Victorious hero! Pay me for those cares
Long past, which man ne'er guesses at;—for years
Of daily, silent suffering, which young soldiers
Have not a word to body forth; for all,—
By filling for a moment these fond arms,
Which held thee first.

THOAS. [*Shrinking from her.*

I cannot. I will kneel,
To thank thee for thy love, ere thou didst kill
Honour and hope;—then grovel at thy feet,
And pray thee trample out the wretched life
Thou gav'st me.

ISMENE.

Ha! Beware, unfeeling man:—
I had oppos'd, had crush'd all human loves,
And they were wither'd; thou hast call'd them forth,

Rushing in crowds from memory's thousand cells,
To scoff at them. Beware! They will not slumber,
But sting like scorpions.

Enter IPHITUS.

Wherefore dost intrude
On this high conference?

IPHITUS.

The people cry
That solemn inquisition should be held
For Creon's blood;—else do they fear the gods
Will visit it on them.

ISMENE.

They need not fear.
It will be well aveng'd.

IPHITUS.

To thee, Ismene,
That which I next must speak, is of dear import;—
Wilt hear it in this noble stranger's presence?

ISMENE.

Say on, old man.

IPHITUS.

From the old crumbling altar,
Just as the gates were open'd, breath'd a voice
In whisper low, yet heard through each recess
Of Jove's vast temple, bidding us to seek

Of thee, Ismene, who the murderer is,
 And summon thee to the same fearful spot,
 To speak it there.

ISMENE.

[*To* THOAS.

Athenian ! dost thou hear ?

THOAS.

I hear.

IPHITUS.

The hostile nations lay aside
 Their quarrel, till this justice to the dead
 Is render'd. Chiefs of each will guard the fane,
 And wait the solemn issue.—In their name,
 And in the mightier name of him whose shrine
 Hath burst long silence, I command thee, queen,
 Thou presently be there.

ISMENE.

I shall obey—

Beside the altar place the regal seat ;
 And there, in state befitting Corinth's queen,
 I'll take my place.

[*To* THOAS.

Farewell ! *Thou* wilt be there !

THOAS.

Be sure I will not fail.

ISMENE.

'Tis well ! 'Tis well !

[*Exit.*

IPHITUS.

Thou saidst thou shouldst attend?

THOAS.

I shall. What more

Would'st thou have with me?

IPHITUS.

I would ask a band

Of the most noble of Athenian youth,
To witness this procedure; and to lend
Their conduct, should the murderer stand reveal'd,
To keep the course of justice unassail'd,
And line the path of death.

THOAS.

All that can make

The wretch accurs'd, shall wait him. Let me breathe
Alone a moment.

[Exit IPHITUS.]

How they'll start to see

The guilty one descend the solemn steps,
And hang their heads for shame, and turn their eyes
In mercy from him.

[Going.]

Enter CREUSA.

CREUSA.

For a moment hear me—

I would not break on thy triumphant hours,
But for my brother's sake. Do not refuse,

For, if he wrong'd thee by a frantic thought,
There was one ready to defend thy honour
From slightest taint !

THOAS.

What taint ? the breath of infamy
Spreads o'er my name already !

CREUSA.

Do not ask—

'Twas a wild thought ;—but there are tongues which make
As false a charge ; tongues which have power to crush
The guiltless !—They have murmur'd that this crime
Is that of Hyllus !

THOAS.

Hyllus the unsullied !

CREUSA.

I knew that thou would'st say so—that no force
Of circumstance would weigh in thy pure thought
Against the beauty of his life. They found him
Just after day-break, suddenly return'd
From exile, in the chamber of the king,
Gazing with bloodless aspect on a sight
Of bloodshed ;—yet thou dost not think 'twas he
That with a craven hand—

THOAS.

O no !

CREUSA.

And thou
Wilt plead his cause—wilt save him from the fate
That threatens his young life?

THOAS.

My own shall first
Be quench'd!

CREUSA.

The gods repay thee for the word!
O brother, brother! could'st thou wrong this heart
With one suspicion? Why dost turn away,
And shrink and shudder in the warrior's dress,
As when I thank'd thee for that brother's life,
At the slave's vest which then, in thy proud thought,
Debas'd the wearer?

THOAS.

O, I thought so then!
Now I would give the treasures of the deep,
Nay more—the hope of glory—to resume
Those servile garments with the spotless thoughts
Of yesterday.

Enter Messenger.

MESSENGER.

My general, Pentheus, asks
If, by thy sanction, Iphitus requires
His presence in the temple?

THOAS.

Pentheus?—Yes.

CREUSA. [THOAS *turns away*.

Why in the temple? wilt not speak?

MESSENGER.

The priest

There summons all to some high trial.

CREUSA.

I see it!—

They meet to judge my brother. I will fly—

THOAS.

Thou must not, lady—in that fearful place,
Horrors unguess'd at by thy gentle nature
Will freeze thy youthful blood, that thou shalt pass
No happy moment more.

CREUSA.

And what have I
To do with happiness? I am not young,
For I grew old in moments charg'd with love
And anguish. Now I feel that I could point
The murderer out with dreadful skill—could mark
The livid paleness, read the shrinking eye,
Detect the empty grasping of the hand
Renewing fancied slaughter;—why dost turn
Thus coldly from me?—Ah! thou hast forgot

The vows which, when in slavery, thou offer'd,
 And I was proud to answer—if not, Thoas,
 Once press my hand ; O gods ! he lets it fall !—
 So withers my last hope—so my poor heart
 Is broken.

[*Faints.*

THOAS.

[*To Messenger.*

Take her gently in. [*Messenger supports her out.*

THOAS.

One glance. [*Looks at her and shudders.*

O that the beauty I have lov'd and worshipp'd
 Should be a thing to shiver me !—'Tis just.

[*Exit.*

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.

The Interior of the Temple of Jupiter the Avenger—ISMENE seated in the midst, in a Chair of State—Corinthians on the right, and Athenians on the left, side of the Temple—At the extremity on the right side, HYLUS standing—At the extremity of the left, THOAS seated.

IPHITUS.

Corinthians and Athenians ! late opposed
In mortal conflict, dedicated now
To solemn work of Justice, hear the will
Of the Avenging Power, beneath whose roof
Ye stand thus marshall'd. Royal blood hath stain'd
A palace floor ;—not shed in blazing war,
But in night's peace ; not some hot soldier's blood,
But the thin current of a frame made sacred
To Orcus' gentlest arrow. Heaven requires
Both nations to unite in dealing death
Upon the slayer, who, unslain, will draw
Its withering curse on both. In yonder shrine
Which dim tradition's fearful whispers made

A terror to my infancy, a voice,
 Which breath'd fell murmurs to ancestral ears,
 Breaks centuries of silence to pronounce
 The Queen as gifted to direct the shaft
 To the curs'd head ;—and every sign around us
 By which the world invisible, when charg'd
 With bloody secret, struggles to subdue
 Things visible to organs which may send
 Its meaning to the startled soul, attest
 The duty I assume.—Ismene !

ISMENE.

Priest

Of Jove, I am attendant to thy summons ;—
 What is thy wish ?

IPHITUS.

Sad widow of a king

Whose feeble life some cruel hand hath stopp'd,
 I do adjure thee, by these hoary hairs,
 That chang'd their hue from raven whilst thou shar'd
 His mansion ;—by celestial powers, who watch
 Our firmness now ;—and by those fearful gods,
 Whom 'tis unblest to mention, lay aside
 All terror, all affection, all remorse,—
 If cause of penitence thou hast, to rend
 The veil of darkness which the murderer wears,
 And give him to his destiny. Begin

The solemn strain which shall attune our souls
To hearken and to execute !

[*Solemn music.*]

IPHITUS.

Ismene,

Speak : Dost thou know the slayer ?

ISMENE.

Yes !

IPHITUS.

Dost thou

Behold him now ?

ISMENE. [*Looking wildly round.*]

I do not see the faces

Or know the names of all. Who is the man
That at the right side of the circle stands ?

IPHITUS.

The youth with head erect and cloudless brow ?
That is the orphan'd Hyllus.

ISMENE.

Who is he

That sits upon the the other side, apart,
With face averted ?

[THOAS *turns his head suddenly, and looks upon her.*]

I behold him now.

It is a dreadful duty you exact
From me—a woman. If I speak the name,
What sentence follows ?

IPHITUS.

Death!

ISMENE.

And soon performed?

IPHITUS.

The Fates require that he thou shalt denounce
As guilty, must be led in silence hence,
And none behold him after, save his slayers.
Attend once more! Thou hast declared thou know'st
The guilty one! I ask thee—is he here?

ISMENE.

O Gods! He is.

IPHITUS.

Name him!

CALCHAS.

She shudders! See,—

I think she cannot speak!

IPHITUS.

If quivering tongue

Refuse its office, point the victim out.

[ISMENE rises; turns towards THOAS, who rises, and
confronts her; she trembles, pauses, and resumes her seat.

IPHITUS.

Thou hast confess'd the guilty one is here;

Where stands he?

[ISMENE rises; points to HYLLUS, shrieks "There!" and
falls back senseless in her chair.

THOAS.

'Tis false !

[CREUSA *rushes forward and embraces* HYLLUS.

CREUSA.

Most false ! O murderess !

Protect him, noble Thoas !

HYLLUS.

Peace, my sister :—

Implore no mortal aid ; let us be patient,

And suffer calmly what the gods decree.

My life may satisfy.

IPHITUS.

It cannot be !

Hold—stir not—breathe not—from that shrine the voice
Of heaven will answer hers. Do ye not hear ? [A pause.
Hark !—It is voiceless, and the youth is doom'd.

THOAS.

Forbear, ye murderous judges ;—look upon him !

See on his forehead Nature's glorious seal

Of innocence, outspeaking thousand voices,

Which shining in the presence of the gods

Still shows him guiltless.

IPHITUS.

Prove it.

THOAS.

With my life-blood !

O could ye place me in some dizzy cleft

Of inmost Thracian hills, when ribb'd with ice,
 To hear from every rocky shelf a howl
 Of wolves arous'd to famine,—I would stand—
 Calm,—O far calmer than I stand,—to wait
 Their fangs, and let my tortur'd sinews' strength
 Attest his cause ;—'twere nothing—'twere no pain—
 To what the spirit feels. Thou talk'st of curses :
 Beware ! There is no curse with such a power
 As that of guiltless blood pour'd out by mortals
 In the mock'd name of justice.

HYLLUS.

[To THOAS, *aside*.

Thou wilt tell
 Thy secret ;—keep it. Leave me to my doom.

THOAS.

Never ! Corinthians, hear me——

ISMENE.

[*Recovering*.

What is this ?
 Why waits the parricide still there ? Who dares
 Dispute my sentence ?

THOAS.

I !

ISMENE.

Be silent. She
 Who most in all the world should have command
 O'er thee, requires thy silence.

PENTHEUS. [*Stepping forward from
the Athenian rank.*

By what right
Dost thou—Queen of the vanquish'd—dare command
The leader of the conquerors?

ISMENE.

By a mother's.

[*THOAS sinks into his seat—ISMENE descends and
stands beside him.*

ISMENE.

Athenians—victors!—'tis your fitting name,
By which I joy to greet you. Ye behold
One whom ye left to suffer, but who boasts
Your noblest blood. See! I command my son
To quit this roof, and leave me to the work
The gods have destined for me.

THOAS.

Stand aside!

I have a suit I would prefer alone,
Which may save guilt and sorrow.

IPHITUS.

[*To* HYLLUS.

Lean on me.

To THOAS.] Be brief.

HYLLUS.

I have no need; yet I will take
This thy last kindness; for I can accept it
Without a blush or shudder.

[*All retire, leaving THOAS and ISMENE in front.*]

THOAS.

Why hast heap'd

Foul crime on crime ?

ISMENE.

Son ! there has been no crime

Except for thee. The love that thou hast scorn'd

From the heart's long-closed shrine, outwhisper'd fate,

And saved thee.

THOAS.

Saved me ! Thou mayest save me yet ;

Recall thy sentence. Give me truth and death !

ISMENE.

And own my falsehood ? No ! Let us go hence

Together.

THOAS.

And permit this youth to die !

O that some god would mirror to my soul

Our mortal passage, while the arid sand

We pace ; the yellow, sunless, sky above us ;

And forms distort with anguish, which shall meet

Each vain attempt to be alone, enclose

The conscious blasters of the earth, till forced

To gaze upon each other, we behold,

As in eternal registry, the curse

Writ in the face of each ! No ; let us pray

For torture and for peace !

ISMENE.

If thou remain,
And risk dishonour to our house and me,
The poisonous cave below shall be my home,
And shelter me for ever !

THOAS.

Thou art brave,
As fits a matron of heroic line ;
Be great in penitence, and we shall meet
Absolv'd, where I may join my hand to thine,
And walk in duteous silence by thy side.

ISMENE.

And couldst thou love me then ?

THOAS.

Love thee ! My mother,
When thou didst speak that word, the gloom of years
Was parted,—and I knew again the face
Which linger'd o'er my infancy,—so pale,
So proud, so beautiful ! I kneel again,
A child, and plead to that unharden'd heart,
By all the long past hours of priceless love,
To let my gushing soul pass forth in grace,
And bless thee in its parting !

ISMENE.

Never !

THOAS.

[*Rising.*

Yes !

Haste ere the roof shall fall, and crush the germ
Of sweet repentance in us ; take thy seat,
And speak as thy heart dictates—

[*Drawing* ISMENE *towards her seat.*

Hear again !

ISMENE.

Unhand me—rebel son ! Assembled Chiefs,
Ye called me—I have spoken once—I speak
No more ; make way there !—I must pass alone !

[*Exit* ISMENE.

THOAS.

[*Calling to* ISMENE.

O ! mother, stay ! She's gone.

[*Sinks into his chair.*

IPHITUS.

Her word decides,
Unless the gods disown it. Peace ! the altar
Is silent ; the last moment presses on us—
Hyllus, the doom'd, stand forth !

CREUSA.

O pause ; to thee
Thoas, I call ; thou know'st him guiltless.

IPHITUS.

Hold !

No mortal passion can have utterance here,
When Fate is audible. To yield is ours ;
Be calm as Hyllus, or forego his hand.

[CREUSA *sinks on her knees beside HYLLUS; IPHITUS lays one hand on the head of HYLLUS, and raises the other towards heaven.*

IPHITUS.

Dread Power, that bade us to this fane, accept
The expiation that we offer now,
And let this blood poured forth atone.

[THOAS *suddenly falls from his seat to the ground.*

CREUSA *rushes to him, and all surround him.*

CREUSA.

Gods! what is this new horror?

[*Opening the vest of THOAS, the dagger falls from it.*

THOAS.

There! 'Tis done!

'Tis well accomplish'd.

CREUSA.

Hyllus, go!

Brother, no more—for thee he perishes.

THOAS.

I will not purchase a last taste of sweetness
By such estrangement. That steel bears the blood
Of Creon and his slayer;—how excus'd
I leave you, generous king, to witness for me.

Enter CALCHAS.

CALCHAS.

The queen !

THOAS.

Hold life a moment—what of her ?

CALCHAS.

She rush'd,

With looks none dared to question, to the cave ;
 Paused at its horrid portal ; toss'd her arms
 Wildly abroad ; then drew them to her breast,
 As if she clasp'd a vision'd infant there ;
 And as her eye, uplifted to the crag,
 Met those who might prevent her course, withdrew
 Her backward step amidst the deadly clouds
 Which veil'd her—till the spectral shape was lost,
 Where none dare ever tread to seek for that
 Which was Ismene.

THOAS.

Peace be with her ! Pentheus,

Thy hand ;—let Hyllus reign in honour here ;—

Convey me to the city of my love ;

Her future years of glory stream more clear

Than ever on my soul. O Athens ! Athens ! [Dies.

HYLLUS.

Sister !

CREUSA.

Forgive me, brother.

[Falls on the neck of Hyllus.]

HYLLUS.

Weep there ; 'tis thy home.

Fate, that has smitten us so young, leaves this—

That we shall cleave together to the grave.

THE CURTAIN FALLS.

THE END.

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